THE ART OF CONTENTM

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Contentment

By the Author of
THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN, &c.

It is but loſt labor, that ye haſten to riſe up early, and ſo late take reſt, and eat the bread of carefulneſs: for ſo he giveth his beloved ſleep.
Pſal. 127. 3.

At the THEATER in OXFORD.
M. DC. LXXVII.

Imprimatur,

RAD. BATHURST.

Vice Cancell. *Oxon.*

Feb. 24. 1675.

THE PREFACE

THE desire of happineſs is ſo coeſſential with our nature, ſo interwoven and incorporate with it; that nothing but the diſſolution of the whole frame can extinguiſh it. This runs thro the whole race of mankind, and amidſt the infinit variety of other inclinations, preſerves its ſelf entire. The moſt various contradictory tempers do yet

yet conſpire in this, and men of the moſt unequal fortunes, are yet equal in their wiſhes of being happy.

But this concurrence as to the end, is not more univerſal then the diſagreement about the way. Every man would have happineſs, but wherein that conſiſts, or how it is to be attain'd has bin very diverſly opin'd, Indeed the ultimate ſupreme happineſs as it is originally inherent in God, ſo it is wrapt up in thoſe clouds and darkneſs, which, as the Pſalmiſt ſaies, are round about him *Pſal.* 18, 11. *And we can ſee nothing of it, but in thoſe gleams and raies he is pleas'd to dart out upon us: ſo that all our eſtimates as to our final felicity, muſt be meſur'd by thoſe revelations he has made of it.*

But

But one would think our temporal happineſs were as much a myſtery as our eternal, to ſee what variety of blind purſuits are made after it. One man thinks tis ſeated on the top pinnacle of honor, and climbs till perhaps he falls head-long. Another thinks it a mineral, that muſt be dig'd out of the earth, and toils to lade himſelf with thick clay, *Hab.* 2. 6. *and at laſt finds a grave, where he ſought his treſure. A third ſuppoſes it conſiſts in the variety of pleſures, and wearies himſelf in that purſuit, which only cloies, and diſappoints. Yet every one of theſe can read you lectures of the groſs miſtake and folly of the other, whilſt himſelf is equally deluded.*

Thus do men chaſe an imaginary good,

good, till they meet with real evils; herein expoſing themſelves to the ſame cheat Laban *put upon* Jacob, *they ſerve for* Rachel, *and are rewarded with* Leah, *court fancied beauty, and marry loath'd deformity. Such deluſive felicities as theſe are the largeſſes of the Prince of the Air, who once attemted to have enveigled* even Chriſt himſelf, *Mat.* 4.

But Gods propoſals are more ſincere: he knows how ſandy, how falſe a foundation all theſe external things muſt make, and therefore warns us not to build ſo much as our preſent ſatisfaction upon them, but ſhews us a more certain, a more compendious way to acquire what we gaſp after, by telling us that as Godlineſs in reſpect of the next, ſo contentment *for this world*

world is great gain. 1 *Tim.* 6. 6. *It is indeed the* unum neceſſarium, *the one point in which all the lines of worldly happineſs are concentred, and to complete its excellence, tis to be had at home: nay indeed only there. We need not ramble in wild purſuits after it, we may form it within our own breaſts: no man wants materials for it, that knows but how to put them together.*

And the directing to that skill is the only deſign of the enſuing Tract, which coming upon ſo kind an errand, may at leaſt hope for an unprejudic'd reception. Contentment is a thing we all profeſs to aſpire to, and therefore it cannot be thought an unfriendly office to endeavor to conduct men to it. How far the enſuing conſide-

ſiderations may tend to that end, I muſt leave to the judgment, and experience of the Reader, only deſiring him that he will weigh them with that ſerioufneſs which befits a thing wherein both his happineſs and duty are concern'd; for in this (as in many other inſtances) God has ſo twiſted them together, that we cannot be innocently miſerable. The preſent infelicities of our murmurs and impatiencies, have an appendant guilt, which will conſign us to a more irreverſible ſtate of diſſatisfaction hereafter

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THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

SECT I.

Of the neceſſary Connexion between Happineſs and Contentment.

I. GOD who is eſſentially happy in himſelf, can receive no acceſſion to his felicity by the poor contributions of men. He cannot therefore be ſuppos'd to have made them upon intuition of increaſing, but communicating his happineſs. And this his original

ginal design is very visible in all the parts of his Economy towards them. When lapsed man had counterplotted against himself, defeated the purpose of the Divine goodness, and plunged his whole nature into the opposite state of endless misery; he yet reinforc'd his first design, and by an expedient as full of wonder as mercy, the death of his Son, recovers him to his former capacity of bliss. And that it might not only be a bare capacity, he has added all other methods proper to work upon a rational creature. He has shewed him his danger, set before him in perspective that eternal Tophet, which he is advis'd to shun. On the other side he has no less lively describ'd the heavenly *Jerusalem*, the celestial Country to which he is to aspire: nay farther has levell'd his road to it, leads him not as he did the Israelites thro the wilderness, thro intricate mazes to puzle his understanding; thro *a land of drought wherein were fiery Serpents and Scorpions*, Deut. 8. 15. to discourage and affright him, but has in the Gospel chalkt out a plain, a safe, nay a pleasant path; as much superior both in the ease of the way, and in the end to which it leads, as heaven is to *Canaan*.

2. By

2. BY doing this, he has not only ſecured our grand and ultimate happineſs, but provided for our intermedial alſo. Thoſe Chriſtian duties which are to carry us to heaven, are our refreſhment, our viaticum in our journy; his yoke is not to gall and fret us, but an engine by which we may with eaſe (and almoſt inſenſibly) draw all the clogs and incumbrances of human life. For whether we take Chriſtianity in its whole complex, or in its ſeveral and diſtinct branches, tis certainly the moſt excellent, the moſt compendious art of happy living: its very tasks are rewards, and its precepts are nothing but a divine ſort of Alchymy, to ſublime at once our nature and our pleſures.

3. THIS may be evidenc'd in every particular of the Evangelical Law: but having formerly made ſome attemt towards it in another * tract, I ſhall not here reaſſume the whole ſubject. I ſhall only ſingle out one particular precept, wherein happineſs is not (as the others) only implied, and muſt be catcht at the rebound by conſequence and event; but is literally expreſt, and is the very matter of the duty; I

* *Decay of Chriſtian Piety.*

mean the precept of acquieſcence and *Contentment*; Happineſs and this true genuine Contentment, being terms ſo convertible, that to bid us be content, is but another phraſe for bidding us be happy.

4. TEMPORAL enjoiments, ſuch as are pleſure, wealth, honor, and the reſt, tho they make ſpecious pretences to be the meſure of human happineſs, are all of them juſtly diſcarded by the Philoſopher in his Ethics, upon this one conſideration, that coming from abroad they may be with-held or taken from us: and our tenure being precarious, we even for that reaſon are unhappy in our moſt deſirable poſſeſſions, becauſe we ſtill are liable to be ſo. And therefore he concludes, that felicity muſt be placed in the mind and ſoul, which ſtands without the reach of fortune; and in the practice of vertue, which in its own nature, and not in its contingent uſe is truly good, and therefore certainly renders the poſſeſſors ſuch.

5. BUT this practice being diffuſed thro the whole extent of Moral duty, *Epictetus* thought he had deſerved well of human nature, when he drew it up in two ſhort words, to *ſuſtain* and *abſtain*: that is to bear with conſtancy adverſe events, and

and with moderation enjoy thoſe that are proſperous. Which complexure of Philoſophy is yet more fully, as well as more compendiouſly expreſt in the ſingle notion of *Contentment*: which involves the patient bearing of all miſadventures, and generous contemt of ſenſual illectives. This ſtate of mind the Greeks expreſs by calling it αὐτάρκεια, or ſelf-ſufficiency, which, we know properly ſpeaking, is one of the incommunicable attributes of the divine nature, and the Stoics expreſly pretend, that by it mortal men are enabled to rival their Gods; in *Seneca*'s Phraſe, to make a controverſy with *Jupiter* himſelf. But abating the inſolent blaſphemy of an independent felicity, Chriſtianity acknowledges a material truth in the aſſertion: and S. *Paul* declares of himſelf, that having *learnt how to want and how to abound, and in whatever ſtate he happens to be in, therewith to be content: he is able to do all things thro Chriſt that ſtrengthens him*, Phil. 4. 11, 12, 13. *and having nothing to poſſeſs all things*, 2 Cor. 6. 10.

6. WHICH great event comes about, not only becauſe all good things are eminently in the divine nature, and he who by Vertue and Religion poſſeſſes Him, thereby

thereby in a full equivalence has every thing; but also upon human measures, and principles of Philosophy: the compendious address to wealth, as *Plato* rightly observ'd, being not to encrease possessions, but lessen desires. And if so, 'twill follow that the contented man must be abundantly provided for, being so entirely satisfied with what he has, as to have no desires at all. Indeed 'tis truly said of covetous men, and is equally verified of all who have any desire to gratify, that they want no less what they have, then what they have not: but the reverse of that Paradox is really made good by *Contentment*, which bestows on men the enjoiment of whatever they have, and also whatever they have not; and by teaching to want nothing, abundantly secures not to want happiness.

7. On the other side this one grace being absent, it is not in the power of any success or affluence to make life a tolerable thing. Let all the materials of earthly happiness be amast together and flung upon one man, they will without contentment be but like the fatal prize of *Tarpeia*'s treason, who was prest to death with the weight of her booty. He that has the elements of felicity, and yet cannot

not form them into a ſatisfaction, is more deſperately miſerable then he that wants them: for he who wants them has yet ſomthing to hope for, and thinks if he had them he might be happy; but he who inſignificantly poſſeſſes them, has no reſerve, has not ſo much as the Flattery of an expectation; for he has nothing left to deſire, and yet can be as little ſaid to enjoy.

8. HE therefore that would have the extract, the quinteſſence of happineſs, muſt ſeek it in Content. All outward acceſſions are but the droſs & earthy part: this alone is the ſpirit, which when tis once ſeparated, depends not upon the fate of the other; but preſerves its vigor when that is deſtroi'd. St. *Paul* whom I before mention'd, is a ready inſtance of it, who profeſſes to be *content in what ever ſtate*; Contentment being not ſo inſeparately link'd to eternal things, but that they may ſubſiſt apart. That thoſe are often without it we are too ſure, and that it may be without them is as certainly true; tho by our own default we have not ſo many examples of it. A heart that rightly computes the difference between temporals and eternals, may reſolve with the Prophet, *Al-*

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tho the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields ſhall yield no meat; the flocks ſhall be cut from the fold, and there ſhall be no herds in the ſtall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation, Hab. 3. 17, 18. He that has God need not much deplore the want of any thing elſe: nor can he that conſiders the plenty and glory of his future ſtate, be much dejected with the want or abjectneſs of his preſent.

9. YET ſo indulgent is God to our infirmities, that knowing how unapt our impatient natures are to *walk only by faith, and not at all by ſight*, 2 Cor. 5. 7. he is pleas'd to give us fair antepaſts of ſatisfaction here, diſpenſes his temporal bleſſings tho not equally, yet ſo univerſally, that he that has leaſt, has enough to oblige not only his acquieſcence, but his thankfulneſs. Tho every man has not all he wiſhes, yet he has that which is more valuable then that he complains to want; nay which he himſelf could worſe ſpare were it put to his option.

10. AND now from ſuch a diſpoſure of things who would not expect that mankind ſhould be the chearfulleſt part of the creation?

creation: that the *ſun ſhould* not more *rejoice to run his courſe.* 19. 5. then man ſhould to finiſh his: that a journy which has ſo bleſſed an end; and ſuch good accommodation by the way, ſhould be paſt with all imaginable alacrity, and that we ſhould live here practicers and learners of the ſtate of unmix'd interminable joies to which we aſpire. But alas, if we look upon the univerſality of men, we ſhall find it nothing ſo; but while all other creatures gladſomly follow the order of their creation, take pleſure in thoſe things God has aſſign'd for them, we with a ſullen perverſneſs quarrel at what we ſhould enjoy, and in every thing make it our buſineſs, not to fit it for our uſe, but to find out ſome conceled quality which may render it unfit. We look inſidiouſly upon our bleſſings, like men that deſign'd only to pick a quarrel, and ſtart a pretence for mutining. From hence it is that man, who was deſign'd the Lord of the world, to whoſe ſatisfaction all inferior beings were to contribute, is now the unhappieſt of the creatures: nay as if the whole order of the univerſe were inverted, he becomes ſlave to his own vaſſals, courts all theſe

little ſublunary things with ſuch paſſion, that if they prove coy and fly his embraces, he is mad and deſperate; if they fling themſelves into his Arms, he is then glutted and ſatiated; like Amnon *he hates more then he loved*, 2 Sam. 13. 15. and is ſicker of his poſſeſſion, then he was of his deſire.

10. And thus will it ever be till we can keep our deſires more at home, and not ſuffer them to ramble after things without reach. That honeſt Roman, who from his extraordinary induſtry upon his little ſpot of ground received ſuch an increaſe as brought him under ſuſpicion of witchcraft, is a good example for us. God has placed none of us in ſo barren a ſoil, in ſo forlorn a ſtate, but there is ſomthing in it which may afford us comfort; let us husband that to the utmoſt, and tis ſcarce imaginable what improvement, even he that appears the moſt miſerable may make of his condition. But if in a ſullen humor we will not cultivate our own field, becauſe we have perhaps more mind to our neighbors, we may thank our ſelves if we ſtarve. The deſpiſing of what God has already given us, is ſure but cold invitation to farther bounty. Men are indeed forced ſomtimes

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to reward the mutinous: but God is not to be ſo attaqued, nor is it that ſort of violence which can ever force heaven. The Heathen could ſay that Jupiter ſent his plagues among the poorer ſort of men, becauſe they were alwaies repining: and indeed there is ſo much of truth in the obſervation, that our impatience and diſcontent at our preſent condition, is the greateſt provocation to God to make it worſe.

11. IT muſt therefore be reſolv'd to be very contrary to our intereſt, and ſurely tis no leſs to our duty. It is ſo if we do but own our ſelves men, for in that is impli'd a ſubordination and ſubmiſſion to that power which made us ſo; and to diſpute his managery of the world, to make other diſtributions of it then he has don, is to renounce our ſubjection, and ſet up for dominion. But this is yet more intolerable as we are Chriſtians, it being a ſpecial part of the Evangelical diſcipline, cherefully to conform to anycondition: to *know how to be abaſed, and how to abound, to be full and to be hungry*, Phil. 4. 12. *to be careful for nothing* ver. 6. Nay ſo little do's Chriſt give countenance to our peeviſh diſcontents, our wanton out-cries when

we are not hurt, that he requires more then a contentment, an exultancy and tranſport of joy under the heavieſt preſſures, under reproches and perſecutions. *Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy*, Lu. 6. 23. And ſure nothing can be more contrary to this, then to be alwaies whining and complaining, crying in the Prophets phraſe, *my leanneſs my leanneſs, wo is me*, Iſa. 24. 16. when perhaps Moſes's ſimile do's better fit our ſtate, *Jeſurun waxed fat and kicked*, Deut. 32. 15.

12. And as this querulous humor is againſt our intereſt and duty, ſo is it viſibly againſt our eaſe. Tis a ſickneſs of the mind, a perpetual gnawing and craning of the appetite without any poſſibility of ſatisfaction: and indeed is the ſame in the heart which the *Caninus appetitus* is in the ſtomach, to which we may aptly enough apply that deſcription we find in the Prophet, *he ſhall ſnatch on the right hand and be hungry, and he ſhall eat on the left and not be ſatisfied*, Eſay. 9. 20. Where this ſharp, this fretting humor abounds, nothing converts into nuriſhment: every new acceſſion do's but excite ſome new deſire: and as tis obſerv'd of a trencher-fed dog, th t he taſts not one bit for the greedy

dy expectation of the next; ſo a diſcontented mind is ſo intent upon his purſuits, that he has no reliſh of his acqueſts. So that what the Prophet ſpeaks of the Covetous, is equally appliable to all other ſorts of Male-contents: *he enlarges his deſire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be ſatisfied*, Hab. 2. 5. And ſure if the *deſire accomplished* be, as Solomon ſaies, *ſweet to the ſoul*, Prov. 13. 19. it muſt be exceedingly bitter, to be thus condemned to endleſs unaccompliſhable deſires; and yet this is the torture which every repining uncontented ſpirit provides for its ſelf.

13. WHAT a madneſs is it then for men to be ſo deſperatly bent againſt their intereſt and duty, as to renounce even their eaſe too for company? One would think this age were ſenſual enough to be at defiance with the leaſt ſhadow of uneaſineſs. It is ſo I am ſure where it ought not, every thing is laborious when tis in compliance with their duty: a few minutes ſpent in praier, *Oh what a wearineſs is it!* Mal. 2. 13. If they chance but to miſs a meal, they are ready to cry out, their *knees are weak thro faſting*. Pſa. 109. 23. yet they can without regret, or any ſelf-compaſſion

paſſion, macerate and cruciate themſelves with anxious cares and vexations, and as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, 1 Tim. 6. 10. *pierce themſelves thro with many ſorrows.* That propoſal therefore which was very raſhly made by St. *Peter* to our Saviour, *Maſter pity thy ſelf*, Mat. 16. 22. which we render *be it far from thee*, would here be an adviſed motion to the generality of mankind, who are commonly made unhappy not by any thing without them, but by thoſe reſtleſs impatiencies that are within them.

14. It may therefore be a ſeaſonable office to endevor the appeaſing theſe ſtorms, by recalling them to thoſe ſober rational conſiderations, which may ſhew as well the folly, as uneaſineſs of this repining unſatisfiable humor. Tis certain that in true reaſoning, we can find nothing whereon to found it, but a great deal to enforce the contray. Indeed tis ſo much againſt the dictate of reaſonable nature to affect damage, ſin, and torment, that were there nothing elſe to be ſaid but what I have already mention'd, it might competently diſcover the great unreaſonableneſs of this ſin.

15. But we need not confine our appeal

peal to reaſon, as it is only a judg of utility and advantage; but enlarge it to another notion, as it is judg of equity and right: in which reſpect alſo it gives as clear and peremtory a ſentence againſt all murmuring impatience. To evince this I ſhall inſiſt upon theſe particulars. 1. that God is debtor to no man, and therefore what ever he affords to any, it is upon bounty not of right, a benevolence not a due. 2ly. That this bounty is not ſtreight or narrow, confin'd to ſome few particular perſons, and wholly overskipping the reſt, but more or leſs univerſally diffuſed to all. So that he who has the leaſt, cannot juſtly ſay but he has bin liberally dealt with. 3ly that if we compare our bleſſings with our allaies, our good things with our evil, we ſhall find our good far ſurmounting. 4ly That we ſhall find them yet more ſo, if we compare them with the good we have don, as on the contrary we ſhall find our afflictions ſcarce diſcernible if balanced with our ſins. 5ly That as God is Rector of the univerſe, ſo it appertains to him to make ſuch allotments, ſuch diſtributions, as may beſt preſerve the ſtate of the whole. 6ly That God notwithſtanding that univerſal care, has

has also a peculiar aspect on every particular Person, and disposes to him what he discerns best for him in special. 7ly If we compare our adversities whith those of other men, we shall alwaies find somthing that equals if not exceeds our own. All these are certain irrefragable truths, and there is none of them single but may, if well prest upon the mind, charm it into a calmness and resignation; but when there is such a conspiration of arguments, it must be a very obstinate perverseness that can resist them: or should they fail to enforce a full conviction, will yet introduce those subsidiary proofs, which I have to alledg, so advantagiously, as will being put altogether, amount unto perfect and uncontroulabe Evidence.

SECT.

Sect. II.

Of Gods Absolute Soveraignty.

1. THE first proposition that God is debtor to no man, is too clear and apparent to require much of illustration: for as he is a free agent and may act as he pleases, so he is the sole proprietary and can wrongfully detain from none, because all original right is in himself. This has bin so much acknowledged by the blindest Heathens, that none of them durst make insolent addresses to their Gods, challenge any thing of them as of debt, but by sacrifices and praiers own'd their dependance and wants, and implor'd supplies. And sure Christianity teaches us not to be more sawcy. If those Deities who ow'd their very being to their votaries, were yet acknowleged to be the spring and source of all, we can with no pretence deny it to that supreme power in *whom we live, move, and have our being*, Acts. 17. 28. For if it were merely an

act of his choice to give us a being, all his ſubſequent bounties can have no other original then his own good pleſure. We could put no obligation upon God before we were: and when we began to be, we were his creatures, and ſo by the moſt indiſputable right owe our ſelves to him, but can have no antecedent title on which to clame any thing from him: ſo that the Apoſtle might well make the challenge which he doth on Gods behalf, *Who hath given any thing unto him, and it ſhall be recompenc'd to him again?* Rom. 11. 35.

2. Now ordinary diſcretion teaches us not to be too bold in our expectation from one to whom we can plead no right. It has as little of prudence as modeſty, to preſs impudently upon the bounty of a Patron, and do's but give him temtation (at leaſt pretence) to deny. And if it be thus with men, who poſſibly may ſomtimes have an intereſt, ſomtimes a vanity to oblige; it muſt be much more ſo towards God, who cannot be in want of us, & therefore need not buy us: *our good*, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *extends not to him.* Pſal. 16. 2. He has a fundamental right in that little we are, which will ſtand good tho it ſhould never be corroborated by greater benefits.

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With what an humble baſhfulneſs ſhould we then ſue for any thing, who have no argument to invite the leaſt donation, being already ſo preingag'd, that we cannot mortgage ſo much as our ſelves in conſideration of any new favor? and ſurely extravagant hopes do very ill befit people in this condition. We ſee the modeſty of good Mephiboſheth, tho he was by a ſlanderous accuſation outed of half the eſtate David had given him, yet upon a reflexion that he deriv'd it all from his good pleſure, diſputed not the ſentence, but cherefully reſign'd the whole to the ſame diſpoſure, from which he received it, ſaying, *Yea let him take all*, 2 Sam. 19. 30. A rare example and fit for imitation, as being adapted to the preſent caſe, not only in that one circumſtance of his having receiv'd all from the King, but alſo in that of the attainder of his blood, which he confeſſes in the former part of the verſe, for *all of my fathers houſe were but dead men before my Lord.* And alas may we not ſay the very ſame? Was not our whole race tainted in our firſt Parent? So that if God had not the primary title of vaſſalage, he would in our fall have acquir'd that of confiſcation and eſcheat.

And can we think our ſelves then in terms to capitulate and make our own conditions, and expect God ſhould humor us in all our wild demands?

3. THIS is indeed to keep up that old rebellion of our Progenitor, for that conſiſted in a diſcontent with that portion God had aſſign'd him, and coveting what he had reſtrain'd him. Nay indeed it comes up to the height of the Devils propoſal, the attemting *to be as God.* Gen. 3. 5. For tis an endevor to wreſt the managery out of his hands, to ſuperſede his Autority of diſpenſing to us, and to carve for our ſelves. This is ſo mad an inſolence, that were it poſſible to ſtate a caſe exactly parallel between man and man, it would raiſe the indignation of any that but pretended to ingenuity. Yet this is, without hyperbole, the true meaning of every murmuring repining thought we entertain.

4. BUT as bad as it is, who is there of us, that can in this particular ſay, *we have made our heart clean?* Prov. 20. 9. Tis true we make ſome formal ackowledgment ſomtimes that we receive all from Gods gift: cuſtom teaches us from our infancy after every meal we eat to give him thanks (tho even that is now thought too much

much respect, and begins to be discarded as unfashionable :) yet sure he cannot be thought to do that in earnest, that has all the time of his eating bin grumbling that his table abounds not with such delicacies as his neighbors. And yet at this rate God knows are most of our thanksgivings. Indeed we have not so much ordinary civility to God, as we have to men. The common proverb teaches us not too curiously to pry into the blemishes of what is given us: but on Gods gifts we sit as Censors, nicely examine every thing which is any way disagreable to our fancies, and as if we dealt with him under the notion of chapmen, disparage it, as Solomon saies buiers use to do, *it is naught, it is naught, saith the buier*, Prov. 20. 14. Nay we seem yet more absurdly to change the scene, and as if God were to make oblations to us, we as critically observe the defects of his benefactions, as the Levitical priests were to do those of the sacrifice, and (like angry Deities) scornfully reject, what ever do's not perfectly answer our wanton appetites.

5. And now should God take us as our words, withdraw all those blessings which we so fastidiously despise, what a con-

condition were we in? Tis ſure we have nothing to plead in reverſe of that judgment. There is nothing in it againſt juſtice: for he takes but his own. This he intimates to Iſrael, Hoſ. 2. 9. I will *return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the ſeaſon thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax:* in which he aſſerts his own propriety, *my corn, my wine*, &c. and recalls them to the remembrance that they were but uſufructuaries: and tis as evident that our tenure is but the ſame. Nay this proceeding would not be repugnant even to mercy, for even that is not obliged ſtill to proſtitute its ſelf to our contemt. I am ſure ſuch a tolerance is beyond all the meſures of humane lenity. Should any of us offer an alms to an indigent wretch, and he when he ſees tis Silver, ſhould murmur and exclame that it is not Gold, would we not draw back our hand and reſerve our charity for a more worthy object? Tis true indeed Gods thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor our narrow bowels equal meſures for the divine conpaſſions, and we experimentally find that his long-ſuffering infinitly exceeds ours; yet we know he do's in the para-

parable of the Lord and the ſervant, Mat. 18. declare, that he will proportion his mercy by ours, in that inſtance; and we have no promiſe that he will not do it in this: nay we have all reaſon to expect he ſhould; for ſince his wiſdom promts him to do nothing in vain, and all his bounty to us is deſign'd to make us happy, when he ſees that end utterly fruſtrated by our diſcontents, to what purpoſe ſhould he continue that to us which we will be never the better for?

6. BESIDES tho he be exceedingly patient, yet he is not negligent or inſenſible: he takes particular notice, not only with what diligence we employ, but with what affections we reſent every of his bleſſings. And as ingratitude is a vice odious to men, ſo it is extremely provoking to God; ſo that in this ſenſe alſo, the words of our Savior are moſt true, from *him that hath not (i.e.)* that hath not a grateful ſenſe and value, *ſhall be taken away even that he hath*, Mat. 25. 29. But we may find a threatning of this kind yet more expreſs to Iſrael, *becauſe thou ſervedſt not the Lord thy God with gladneſs and with joifulneſs of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore ſhalt thou*

thou ſerve thine enemies, whom the Lord God will ſend among thee, in hunger and in thirſt, and in nakedneſs, and in want of all things, Deut 28. 27. 28. a ſad and diſmal inverſion, yet founded wholly in the want of that cheerful recognition which God expected from them. And if Iſrael, the lot of his own inheritance, that people whom he had ſingled out from all the nations of the world, could thus forfeit his favor by unthankfulneſs; ſure none of us can ſuppoſe we have any ſurer entail of it. In a word as God loves a cheerful giver, ſo he alſo loves a cheerful receiver, one that complies with his end in beſtowing, by taking a juſt complacence in his gifts. But the querulous and unſatisfied, reproch his bounty: accuſe him of illiberality and narrowneſs of mind. So that he ſeems even in his honor engag'd to bring them to a righter apprehenſion of him, and by a deprivation teach them the value of thoſe good things, which they could not learn by the enjoiment.

7. IF therefore ingenuity and gratitude cannot, yet at leaſt let prudence and ſelf-love engage us againſt this ſin of *Murmuring*, which we ſee do's abundantly juſtify the character the Wiſe man gives

gives when he tells us *tis unprofitable*, Wiſ. 1. 11. he might have ſaid pernicious alſo, for ſo it evidently is in its effects. Let us then arm our ſelves againſt it, and to that purpoſe impreſs deeply upon our minds the preſent conſideration, that God ows us nothing, and that what ever we receive is an alms, and not a tribute. *Diogenes* being asked what wine drank the moſt pleſant, anſwered, that which is drunk at anothers coſt. And this circumſtance we can never miſs of to recommend our good things to us: for be they little or much, they come *gratis*. When therefore in a pettiſh mood we find our ſelves apt to charge God fooliſhly, and to think him ſtrait-handed towards us, let us imagine we hear God expoſtulating with us, as the houſholder in the parable, *Friend I do thee no wrong: is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?* Mat. 20. 15. If God have not the right of diſpoſing, let us find out thoſe that have, and ſee how much better we ſhall ſpeed: but if he hath, let us take heed of diſputing with him: we that ſubſiſt merely by his favor, had need court and cheriſh it by all the arts of humble obſervance. Every man is ready to ſay how ill beggary

and pride do agree. The first qualification we cannot put off; O let us not provide it of the other so inconvenient so odious an adjunct. Let us leave off prescribing to God (which no ingenuous man would do to an earthly benefactor) and let us betake our selves to a more holy and successful policy, the acknowledgment of past mercies, and our own unworthiness. This was *Jacobs* method, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shew'd unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this* Jordan, *and now I am become two bands*, and with this humble preface he introduces his petition for rescue in his present distress, *Deliver me I pray thee from the hand of my brother*, &c. Gen. 32. 10. 11. An excellent pattern of Divine Rhetoric, which the success demonstrates to have bin very prevalent. And we cannot transcribe a better copy, to render our desires as successful. Indeed we are so utterly destitute of all arguments from our selves, that we can make no reasonable form of address, if we found it not in somthing of God: and there is nothing even in him adapted to our purpose, but his mercy; nor can that be so advantage-

tageously urged by any thing, as by the former instances it has given of it self: for as God only is fit to be a precedent to himself, so he loves to be so. Thus we find, not only *Moses*, but God often recollecting his miraculous favors towards *Israel*, as an argument to do more: let us therefore accost him in his own way, and by a frequent and grateful recounting of his former mercies, engage him to future. Nor need we be at a loss for matter of such recollection, if we will but seriously consider what we have already received, which is the subject of the next Section.

Sect. III.

Of Gods unlimited Bounty.

1. IT is the known character of an unworthy nature, to write injuries in Marble, and benefits in duſt: and however ſome (as *Seneca* well obſerves) may acquit themſelves of this imputation as to man, yet ſcarce any do ſo in relation to God. Tis true indeed the charge muſt be a little varied; for God neither will nor can do us injury: yet we receive any thing that is adverſe with ſuch a reſentment as if it were, and engrave that in our memories with indelible characters, whilſt his great and real benefits are either not at all obſerv'd, or with ſo tranſient an advertence, that the compariſon of duſt is beyond our pitch, and we may be more properly ſaid to write them in water. Nay ſo far are we from keeping records and regiſters of his favors, that even thoſe ſtanding and fixt ones which ſenſe can promt us to (without the aid of our memories) cannot obtain our notice.

2. WERE it not thus, it were impoſſible for men to be ſo perpetually in the com-

complaining Key, as if their voices were capable of no other ſound. One wants this, and another that, and a third ſomthing beyond them both, and ſo on *ad infinitum*; when all this while every one of them enjoies a multitude of good things without any remark. That very breath wherewith they utter their complaints, is a bleſſing, and a fundamental one too: for if God ſhould withdraw that, they were incapable of whatſoever elſe they either have, or deſire. Tis true that ſome mens impatiencies have riſen ſo high, as to caſt away life, becauſe it was not clothed with all circumſtances they wiſht. Yet theſe are rare inſtances, and do only ſhew ſuch mens depraved judgment of things. A rich Jewel is not the leſs valuable, becauſe a mad man in his raving fit flings it into the fire: but as to the generality of men, the Devil (tho a liar) gave a true account of their ſenſe, when he ſaid, *Skin for skin, and all that a man hath will he give for his life,* Job. 2. 4. And tho perhaps in an angry fit many men have with *Jonas*, Chap. 4. 3. *wiſht to die*, yet ten to one ſhould death then come, they would be as willing to divert it, as was the man in the Apologue, who wearied

ed with his burden of ſticks, flung it down and call'd for death, but when he came, own'd no other occaſion for him, but to be helpt up again with his bundle. I dare in this appeal to the experience of thoſe, who have ſeemed very weary of life, whether when any ſuddain danger has ſurpriſed them, it has not as ſuddenly altered their mind, and made them more deſire life, then before they abhorr'd it. Tis the common ſaying, as long as there is life there is hope: there is ſo as to ſecular concerns, for what ſtrange revolutions do we often ſee in the age of man? from what deſpicable beginnings have many arriv'd to the moſt ſplendid conditions? Of which we have divers modern as well as ancient inſtances. And indeed tis admirable to ſee what time and induſtry will (with Gods bleſſing) effect. *But there is no work, nor device, nor knowledg, nor wiſdom in the grave*, Ec. 9 10. we can improve no more when we are once tranſplanted thither.

3. BUT this is yet much more conſiderable in reſpect of our ſpiritual ſtate. Our life is the *day wherein we are to work*, Joh. 9 4. (yea to work out our Salvation:) but *when the night comes* (when death o-

ver-

vertakes) ***no man can work.*** Now alas when tis conſider'd how much of this day the moſt of us have loiter'd away, how many of us have ſtood idle till the ſixth or ninth hour, it will be our concern not to have our day cloſe before the eleventh. Nay alas tis yet worſe with us: we have not only bin idle, but very often ill buſied; ſo that we have a great part of our time to unravel, and that is not to be don in a moment. For tho our works may fitly enough be repreſented by the Prophets compariſon of a *ſpiders web*, Iſay. 59. 5. yet they want the beſt property even of that; they cannot be ſo ſoon undon. Vices that are radicated by time and cuſtom, lie too deep to be lightly ſwept away. Tis no eaſy thing to perſwade our ſelves to the will of parting with them. Many violences we muſt offer to our ſelves, a long and ſtrict courſe of mortification muſt be gon thro, ere we can find in our hearts to bid them be gon: and yet when we do ſo, they are not ſo tractable as the Centurions ſervants. They will indeed come when ever we bid them, but they will ſcarce go ſo: they muſt be expell'd by force and by ſlow degrees; we muſt fight for every inch of ground we gain

gain from them: and as God would not aſſiſt the Iſraelites to ſubdue the Canaanites at once, Deut. 7. 22. ſo neither ordinarily do's he us to maſter perfectly our corruptions. Now a proceſs of this difficulty is not to be diſpatcht on a ſudden. And yet this is not all our task, for we have not only ill habits to extirpate, but we have alſo good ones to acquire: tis not a mere negative vertue will ſerve our turns, nor will emty lamps enter us into the marriage chamber, Mat. 25. 10. *We muſt add to our faith vertue, and to vertue knowledg, and to knowledg temperance,* &c. 2 Pet. 1. 5. No link muſt be wanting of that ſacred chain, but we muſt (as the ſame Apoſtle adviſes) *be holy in all manner of converſation,* 1 Pet. 1. 15.

4. And now I would deſire the Reader ſeriouſly to conſider, whether he can upon good grounds tell himſelf that this ſo difficult (and yet ſo neceſſary) a work is effectually wrought in him. If it be, he is a happy man, and can with no pretence complain of any external want: (he that is fed with Manna, muſt be ſtrangely perverſe if he murmure for a belly-full of *leeks and onions*, Num. 11. 15.) But on the contrary he owes infinite thanks to God, that

that has ſpared him time for this important buſineſs, and did not put a period to his natural life, before he had begun a ſpiritual. For I fear there are among the beſt of us few of ſo entire an innocence, but they may remember ſome, either habits or acts of ſin, in which it would have bin dreadful for them to have bin ſnatcht away. And then how comprehenſive, how prolific a mercy has life bin to them, when it has carried eternity in its womb, and their continuance on earth has qualified them for heaven? Neither are ſuch perſons only to look on it as a bleſſing in the retroſpect, as it relates to the paſt, but alſo in the preſent and future: which if they continue to employ well, do's not only confirm, but advance their reward. Beſides God may pleaſe by them to glorify himſelf, make them inſtrumental to his ſervice; which as it is the greateſt honor, ſo it is alſo the greateſt ſatisfaction to a good heart. He ſhews himſelf too mercenary that ſo longs for his reward, as to grow impatient of his attendances: he that loves God, thinks himſelf bleſt in the opportunity of doing work, as well as in receiving wages. Thus we ſee how life is under all theſe aſpects a mercy to a pious

man, and ſuch as not only obliges him to contentment, but gratitude.

5. But ſuppoſing a man cannot give this comfortable account of his life, but is conſcious that he has ſpent it to a very different purpoſe, yet do's not that at all leſſen his obligations to God, who meant he ſhould have emploi'd it better, and that he has not don ſo is merely his own fault. Nay indeed the worſe his ſtate is, the greater mercy it is, that God has not made it irreverſible, that he has not cut him off at once from the earth and the poſſibility of heaven too, but affords him yet a longer *day, if* yet *he will hear his voice*, Pſal. 95. 7. This long-ſuffering is one of the moſt tranſcendent acts of divine goodneſs, and therefore the Apoſtle rightly ſtiles it *the riches of his goodneſs and long-ſuffering and forbearance*, Rom. 2. 4. and ſo at laſt we commonly acknowledg it, when we have worn it out, and can no longer receive advantage by it. What a value do's a gaſping deſpairing ſoul put upon a ſmall parcel of that time, which before he knew not how faſt enough to ſquander? Oh that men would ſet the ſame eſtimate on it before: and then certainly, as it would make them better husbands of it,

it, ſo it would alſo render them more thankful for it, *Accounting that the long-ſuffering of our Lord is Salvation*, 2 Pet. 3. 15.

6. INDEED did men but rightly compute the benefit of life upon this ſcore, all ſecular encumbrances and uneaſineſſes of it would be over-whelmed, and ſtand only as Cyphers in the account. What a ſhame is it then that we ſhould ſpend our breath in ſighs and out-cries? which if we would employ to thoſe nobler ends for which twas given, would ſuperſede our complaints, and make us confeſs we were well dealt with, that *our life* (tho bare and ſtript of all outward acceſſaries) *is given us for a prey*, Jer. 45. 5. And indeed he that has yet the great work of life to do, can very ill ſpare time or ſorrow to beſtow upon the regretting any temporal diſtreſs, ſince his whole ſtock is little enough to bewail and repair his neglects of his eternal concerns. Were our lives therefore deſtitute of all outward comfort, nay were they nothing but a ſcene of perpetual diſaſters, yet this one advantage of life would infinitly out-weigh them all, and render our murmuring very inexcuſable.

7. But God has not put this to the utmoſt trial, has never plac'd any man in ſuch a ſtate of unmixt calamity, but that he ſtill affords many and great allaies: he finds it fit ſomtimes to defalk ſome of our outward comforts, and perhaps imbitter others, but he never takes all away. This muſt be acknowledged, if we do but conſider how many things there are in which the whole race of mankind do in common partake. The four Elements, fire and water, air and earth, do not more make up every mans compoſition, then they ſupply his needs: the whole hoſt of heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, *Moſes*, will tell us, are by *God divided to all nations under the whole heaven*, Deut. 4. 19. Thoſe reſplendent bodies, equally afford their light and influence to all. The ſun ſhines as bright on the poor Cottage, as on the moſt magnificent Palace; and the ſtars have their benign Aſpects, as well for him that *is behind the Mill*, as for *him that ſitteth on the Throne*, Ex. 11. 5. Propriety (the great incendiary below) breeds no confuſion in thoſe celeſtial Orbs, but they are every mans treſure, yet no mans peculiar (as if they meant to teach us, that our love of appropriation *deſcends not from above*

above, Jam. 3. 15. is no heavenly quality.)

8. AND as they make no diſtinction of the ranks and degrees of men, ſo neither do they of their vertues. Our Savior tells us, God cauſes *his Sun to riſe on the good and on the evil, and ſendeth rain on the juſt and on the unjuſt*, Mat. 5. 45. If now we deſcend lower to the ſublunary creatures, they equally pay their homage to man, do not diſdain the dominion of the poor, and ſubmit to that of the rich, but ſhew us that their inſtinct extends to the whole nature. An horſe draws the poor mans plough, as tamely as the Princes chariot, and the beggars hungry cur follows him with as much obſequiouſneſs and affection as the pamper'd lap-dogs of the niceſt Ladies. The ſheep obey a poor mercenary ſhepherd as well as they did the Daughters of the wealthy *Laban*, Gen. 29. 9. or of *Jethro* a Prince, Exod. 2. 26. and as willingly yield their fleece to clothe *Lazarus*, as to make purple for *Dives*. And as animals, ſo vegetables are as communicative of their qualities to one man as another. The corn nuriſhes, the fruits refreſh, the flowers delight, the ſimples cure the poor man as well as the rich.

9. BUT I foreſee it will be objected, that

that theſe natural priviledges are inſignificant, becauſe they are evacuated by thoſe poſitive laws which bound propriety, and that therefore tho one man could uſe the creatures as well as another, yet every man has them not to uſe. I anſwer, that for ſome of the things I have mention'd, they are ſtill in their native latitude, cannot be incloſed or monopoliz'd. The moſt ravenous oppreſſor could never yet lock up the ſun in his cheſt: *he that laies houſe to houſe and land to land, till there be no place*, Eſay. 5. 8. cannot incloſe the common air: and the like may be ſaid of divers of the reſt: ſo that there are ſome (and thoſe no mean) bleſſings, which continue ſtill the indefeiſible right of mankind in general.

10. As for thoſe other things which are liable to the reſtrictive terms of *meum* and *tuum*, tis not to be deni'd but there is vaſt difference in the diſpenſing them; as great as *Nathans* parable deſcribes, when he ſpeaks of the numerous flocks of the rich man, and the *ſingle ewe lamb of the poor*, 2 Sam. 12. 2. yet there is ſcarce any ſo deplorably indigent, but that by one means or other, he has or may have the neceſſary ſupports of life. Perhaps they fall

fall not into his lap by birth-right and inheritance, yet they are acquirable by labor and industry, which is perhaps the better tenure. They cannot it may be arrive to *Sodoms fulness of bread*, yet if they have not her *abundance of Idleness*, Ez. 16.40. they commonly need not want that, which was the height of *Agurs* wish, *food convenient*, Pro.30.8. Tis true indeed, if they will fold their hands in their bosom, if with *Solomons Sluggard, they will not plough by reason of the cold*, they must take his fate in the summer, as they have his ease in the winter, *they may beg in harvest, and have not bing*, Prov. 20. 4. But then tis visible they are the Authors of their own necessities. And indeed to men of such azy careless natures, tis hard to say, what degree of Gods bounty can keep them from want, since we often see the fairest fortunes dissipated as well by the supine negligence, as the riotous prodigality of the owners. And therefore if men will be idle, they are not to accuse God, but themselves if they be indigent.

11. BUT then there is one case wherein men seem more inevitably expos'd, and that is when by age, sickness, or decrepitness, they are disabled from work, or

or when their family is too numerous for their work to maintain. And this indeed ſeems the moſt forlorn ſtate of poverty: yet God has provided for them alſo, by aſſigning ſuch perſons to the care of the rich: nay he has put an extraordinary mark of favor on them, given them the honor of being his proxies and repreſentatives, made them letters of Attorny (as it were) to demand relief in his name, and upon his account. And tho tis too true, that even that Autority will not prevail with many of the rich to open their purſes, yet even in this Age of frozen charity, there are ſtill ſome who remember upon what terms they received their wealth, and employ it accordingly. And tho the number of them is not ſo great as were to be wiſht, yet there are in all parts ſome ſcattered here and there like *Cities of refuge* in the Land, Deut. 19. 2. to which theſe poor diſtreſſed creatures may flee for ſuccour. And I think I may ſay, that between the legal proviſions that are made in this caſe, and voluntary contributions, there are not very many that want the things that are of abſolute neceſſity: and we know St. *Paul* comprizes thoſe in a ſmall compaſs, *food and raiment*, and propoſes them

them as ſufficient materials of Content; 1 *Tim.* 6. 8. I ſay not this to contract any mans bowels, or leſſen his compaſſions to ſuch poor wretches. For how much ſoever they lend, I wiſh as *Joab* did in another caſe to *David*, the Lord *increaſe it a hundred fold*, 2 Sam. 24. 3. I only urge it as an evidence of the aſſertion I am to prove, that no man is ſo pretermitted by God, or his diſpoſal of temporals, but that even he that ſeems the moſt abandon'd has a ſhare in his Providence, and conſequently cannot juſtly murmur, ſince even this ſtate which is the higheſt inſtance of human indigence, is not without its receits from God.

12. But the number in this form are but few, compar'd to thoſe in a higher; for between this & the higheſt affluence, how many intermedial degrees are there, in which men partake not only of the neceſſaries, but comforts of life; that have not only food and raiment, but their diſtinction of Holy-day and Working-day, fare and apparel? He that is but one ſtep advanced from beggery has ſo much, he that has got to a ſecond has more then is neceſſary, and ſo every degree riſes in plenty till it comes to vanity and exceſs.

and even there too there are gradual risings, some having so much fewel for luxury, that they are at as great a loss for invention, as others can be for materials, and complain that there are no farther Riots left for them to essay. How many are there who have so cloi'd and glutted their senses, that they want some other inlets for pleasure, and with the rich man in the Gospel, are in distress where to bestow their abundance?

13. And sure such as these cannot deny that they have receiv'd good things, yet generally there are none less contented; which is a clear demonstration that our repinings proceed not from any defect of bounty in God, but from the malignant temper of our own hearts. And as it is an easier thing to satisfy the cravings of an hungry, then to cure the nauseous recoilings of a surfeited stomach; so certainly the discontents of the poor, are much easier allai'd then those of the rich. The indigence of the one has contracted his desires, and has taught him not to look farther then a little beyond bare necessaries, so that a moderate Alms satisfies, and a liberal transports him: but he who by a perpetual repletion has his desires stretcht

and

and extended, is capable of no ſuch ſatiſfaction. When his enjoiments foreſtall all particular purſuits, and he knows not upon what to faſten his next wiſh; yet even then he has ſome confus'd unform'd appetites, and thinks himſelf miſerable becauſe he cannot tell what would make him more happy. And yet this is that envi'd ſtate which men with ſo much greedineſs aſpire to. Every man looks on it as the top of felicity, to have nothing more to wiſh in the World. And yet alas even that when attain'd, would be their torment. Let men never think then that contentment is to be caught by long and foreign chaces; he is likelieſt to find it who ſits at home, and duly contemplates thoſe Bleſſings which God has brought within his reach, of which every man has a fair proportion, if he will advert to it.

14. For beſides theſe exterual acceſſions (of which the meaneſt have ſome, the middle ſort a great deal, and the uppermoſt rather too much) man is a principality within himſelf, and has in his compoſure ſo many excellent impreſſes of his Makers power and goodneſs, that he need not ask leave of any exterior thing to be happy, if he know but aright how

to value himself; the very meaneſt part of him, his body, is a piece of admirable workmanſhip, of a moſt incomprehenſible contrivance, as the Pſalm ſt ſaies, *he is fearfully and wonderfully made*; and 'tis aſtoniſhing to think of what a ſymmetry of parts this beautiful Fabric is made up. Nor are they only for ſhew, but uſe: every member, every limb is endowed with a particular faculty to make it ſerviceable to the whole; and that admirable contexture of veins and arteries, ſinews and muſcles, nerves and tendons, none are ſuperfluous, but ſome way or other contribute to vegetation, ſenſe, or motion. Nay the moſt noble and moſt uſeful parts are all of them double, not only as a reſerve in caſe of miſadventure of one part; but alſo as an inſtance of the bounty of the Donor. And indeed it is obſervable of *Galen* in his Writings, that after he had taken great care to exemt himſelf and all of his Profeſſion from taking notice of the Deity, by ſaying, That to diſcourſe concerning the Gods, was the task of ſpeculative Philoſophers; yet coming to write *de uſu partium*, and conſidering the frame of humane Bodies, and therein diſcovering the wonderful contrivance of every

very part in reference to its ſelf, and alſo to the whole, their ſtrength, agility, and various movement, infinitly ſurpaſſing the powers of all Mechanic Engines, he ſeems to have had the fate we read of *Saul* in holy Scripture, and againſt his genius and purpoſe, to become a Prophet, breaking frequently out into Hymns and ſacred raptures; ſaying, theſe Myſteries are more Divine then the *Samothracian* or *Eleuſinian*; and confeſſing they both ſtrictly require, and infinitly excel the low returns of human praiſe. But beyond the fabric of parts as organic, what an extract of wonder are our ſenſes, thoſe *five operations of the Lord*, as the ſon of *Syrach* rightly (and by way of eminence) ſtiles them, *Ec.* 17. 5? By theſe we draw all outward objects to our ſelves. What were the beauties of the Univerſe to us, if we had not ſight to behold them, or the moſt melodious ſounds, if we had not hearing? and ſo of the reſt. And yet theſe are not only generally given, but alſo preſerv'd to the greater part of men: and perhaps would be to more, did not our baſe undervaluing of common mercies, force God ſomtimes to inſtruct us in their worth, by making us feel what it is to want them.

15. MUL-

15. MULTITUDE of refreſhments alſo God has provided for our Bodies, particularly that of ſleep, of which he has bin ſo conſiderate, as in his diſtributions of time, to make a ſolemn allotment for it: yet who almoſt when he lies down conſiders the mercy, or when he riſes refreſht, riſes thankful alſo? (But if our reſt at any time be interrupted by the cares of our mind, or pains of our bodies, then, (and not till then) we conſider, that 'tis *God who gives his beloved ſleep*, Pſal. 127.2. and think it a bleſſing worth our eſteem.) Thus 'tis with health, ſtrength, and every thing elſe, we deſpiſe it whilſt we have it, and impatiently deſire it whilſt we have it not; but in the interim ſure we cannot complain, that Gods hand is ſhortned towards us, when in the ordinary courſe of his Providence we commonly enjoy theſe Mercies many years, which we find ſo much miſs of, if they be withdrawn but for a few hours. And indeed, there is not a greater inſtance of human pravity then our ſenſeleſs contemt of Bleſſings, merely becauſe they are cuſtomary; which in true reaſon is an argument why we ſhould prize them the more. When we deal with men, we diſcern it well

well enough, he that gives me once 100 pounds, I account not ſo much my Benefactor, as if he made it my annual revenue; yet God muſt loſe his thanks, by multiplying his favors; and his benefits grow more inviſible by their being alwaies before us.

16. BUT the Body (with its enjoiment) is but the loweſt inſtance of Gods bounty, 'tis but a decent caſe for that ineſtimable Jewel he has put in it: the Soul, like the Ark, is the thing for which this whole Tabernacle was framed, and that is a ſpark of Divinity in which alone it is that God accompliſhed his deſign of *making man in his own image*, Gen. 1. 26. 'Twould be too long to attemt an exact ſurvey of its particular Excellencies. The mere intellectual powers wherewith it is indued, have exerciſed the curioſity and raiſed the admiration of the great contemplations of Nature in all Ages; yet after all, of ſo ſubtile compoſure is the ſoul, that it is inſcrutable even to it ſelf: and tho the ſimpleſt man knows he has the faculties of Imagination, Apprehenſion, Memory, Reflecting; yet the learneſt cannot aſſign where they are ſeated, or by what means they operate. 'Tis enough

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to us that we have them, and many excellent uſes for them; one whereof (and a moſt neceſſary one) is a thankful reflexion on the goodneſs of God who gave them. He might have made us in the very loweſt form of Creatures, inſenſible ſtocks or ſtones; or if he had advanc'd us a ſtep higher, he might have fixt us among mere Animals, made us perhaps of the noxious, at beſt of the tamer ſort of beaſts; but he has plac'd us in the higheſt rank of viſible creatures, and not only given us *Dominion over the works of his hands*, Pſalm 8. 6. but has given us Reaſon wherewith to manage that Soveraignty, without which we had only bin the more maſterleſs ſort of brutes.

17. YET ſtill the Soul is to be conſider'd in a higher notion, that of its Immortality and capacity of endleſs Bliſs: and here indeed it owns its extraction, and is an Image of the firſt Being, whoſe felicity is coexiſtent with himſelf; this, as it is the moſt tranſcendent accompliſhment of our Nature, ſo it is moſt univerſal. Whatever diſparity there may be tween man and man in other reſpects, yet in this all are equal. The poor begger at the gate has a Soul as capacious of Eter-

eternal happineſs, as he whoſe *crumbs* he begs for (nay ſomtimes better prepar'd for it, as that parable ſhews, Luke 16. 11.) And tho the dignities of earth are the prize of the rich and noble, the ſubtle and deſigning; yet heaven is as eaſily mounted from the dung-hill as the throne, and an honeſt ſimplicity will ſooner bring us thither, then all the Machiavelian policy. Nay God has not only deſign'd us to ſo glorious an end, but has don all on his part to ſecure us of it, ſent his Son to lead us the way, his ſpirit to quicken us in it. We need not diſpute how univerſal this is; tis ſure it concerns all to whom I am now ſpeaking, thoſe that are within the pale of the Church: and if it ſhould prove confin'd only to them, the more peculiar is their obligation, that are thus ſingled out from the reſt of the world, and the greater ought to be their thankfulneſs. The heathen Philoſopher made it matter of his ſolemn acknowledgment to fortune, that he was born a Grecian and not a Barbarian: and ſure the advantages of our Chriſtianity are of a much higher ſtrain, and ought to be infinitly more celebrated. The Apoſtle we find often applauding this glorious privilege, as that

which makes us *fellow citizens with the Saints, and of the houshold of God* Ephes. 2. 19. nay which elevates us to a higher state, *the adoption of sons*, Gal. 4. 5. nor only Sons, but *Heirs also of God and joint Heirs with Christ*, Rom. 8. 17. And what ambition is there so greedy which this will not satisfy? yet this is our common state, the birth-right of our regeneration, if we do not degrade our selves, and with *Esau* basely sell our title.

18. And now methinks every man may interrogate himself in the same form, wherein *Jonadab* did *Amnon*, 2 Sam. 13. 4. *Why art thou, being the Kings son, thus lean from day to day?* Why should a Person who is adopted by the King of Kings, thus languish and pine? What is there below the sun worthy his notice, much less his desires, that hath a Kingdom above it? Certainly did we but know how to estimate our selves upon this account, twere impossible for us with such sordid condescentions to court every petty wordly interst, and so impatiently vex our selves when we cannot attain it. Alas how unworthily do we bear the name of Christians, when that which carried the Forefathers of our Faith thro the most fiery trials,

als, cannot ſupport us under the diſappointment of any extravagant deſire? They had ſuch *reſpect to the recompence of the reward*, Heb. 11. 26. as made them cheerfully expoſe their Fame to ignominy, their Goods to rapine, their Bodies to the moſt exquiſite tortures, and their Lives to death. Yet the ſame hopes cannot work us to any tolerable degree of patience, when we ſuffer but the ſmalleſt diminution in any of theſe. What ſhall we ſay? is Heaven grown leſs valuable, or Earth more then it was then? No ſurely, but we are more infatuated in our eſtimates: we have ſo long abetted the rivalry of the hand-maid, that the Miſtreſs, like *Sarah*, appears deſpicable. Like *Jonah* we ſit down ſullen upon the withering of a gourd, never conſidering that God has provided us a better ſhelter, *a building of God eternal in the Heavens*, 2 Cor. 5 1. Indeed there can be no temporal deſtitution ſo great, which ſuch an expectation cannot make ſupportable. Were we in *Jobs* condition ſitting upon a dunghil, and ſcraping our ſelves with a potſherd, yet as long as we ſay with him *our Redeemer liveth*, Job. 19. 25. we have all reaſon to ſay with him alſo, *bleſſed be the name of the*

Lord, Ch. 1. 21. What a madneſs is it then for us to expoſe our ſelves to be pierc'd and wounded by every temporal adverſity, who have ſo impenetrable an armour? nay what an ungrateful contumely is it to that goodneſs of God, to ſhew that we cannot make him a counterpoiſe to the moſt trivial ſecular ſatisfaction? on which account ſure he may again take up that exprobrating complaint we find in the Prophet, *A goodly price that I was valued at by them*, Zac. 11. 13.

19. But how mean ſoever he is in our eies, tho *Chriſt* ſeem the ſame to us in his glory which he did in his abjection, to have no beauty that we ſhould deſire him; yet he puts another rate upon himſelf, and tells us that he *that loves Father or Mother, Son or Daughter more then me, is not worthy of me*, Mat. 10. 37. Now our love and our joy are paſſions coincident, and therefore whatever we joy more in then we do in him, we may be preſum'd to love better; and if he cannot endure the competition of thoſe more ingenuous objects of our love he there mentions, how will he ſuffer that of our vanities, our childiſh wanton appetites? And yet thoſe are the things after which we ſo impatiently

ently rave. For I believe I may truly affirm, that if there were a ſcrutiny made into all the diſcontents of mankind, for one that were faſtned upon any great conſiderable calamity, there are many that are founded only in the irregularity of our own deſires.

20. By what has bin ſaid we may juſtly conclude in the Prophets phraſe, *God hath not bin to us a wilderneſs, a land of darkneſs*, Jer. 2. 31. but has graciouſly diſpenc'd to us in all our intereſts. Yet the inſtances here given are only common, ſuch as relate to all, or at leaſt the far greater part of mankind: but what volums might be made, ſhould every man ſet down his own particular experiences of mercy? In that caſe 'twould be no extravagant Hyperbole we find, Joh. 22. 25. *That even the world it ſelf could not contain the books which ſhould be written.* God knows our memories are very frail, and our obſervations ſlight in this point: yet abſtracting from all the forgotten or neglected favors, what vaſt Catalogues may every man make to himſelf, if he would but yet recollect, what effects he has had of Gods bounty in giving, of his providence in protecting, of his grace in reſtraining,

ſtraining and exciting of his patience in forbearing? And certainly all theſe productions of the divine goodneſs were never deſign'd to die in the birth. The Pſalmiſt will tell us, *The Lord hath ſo don his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance*, Pſ. 111. 4. Let every man then make it his daily care to recount to himſelf the wonders God hath don, as for the children of men in general, ſo for himſelf in particular. When the Iſraelites murmured under their bondage, *Pharaoh* imputes it to their idleneſs, and preſcribes them more work, as the readieſt cure: a piece indeed of inhuman Tyranny in him, but may with equity and ſucceſs be practiced by us upon our ſelves. When we find our appetites mutinous, complaining of our preſent condition, let us ſet our ſelves to work, impoſe it as a task upon our ſelves to recollect the many inſtances of Gods mercies. And ſurely if we do it ſincerely, and with intention, we cannot have paſt thro half our ſtages, before our ſullen murmurs will be beat out of countenance, and retire with ſhame, when they are confronted with ſuch a cloud of witneſſes, ſuch ſignal teſtimonies of Gods good-

goodneſs to us: for when we have muſter'd up all our little grievances, moſt critically examin'd all our wants, we ſhall find them very unproportionable to our comforts, and to our receits; in which comparative notion, the next Section is to conſider them.

SECT.

Sect. IV.

Of the Surpluſage of our Enjoiments above our Sufferings.

1. TO regulate our eſtimate of thoſe things which we either enjoy or ſuffer, there are three precedent queries to be made: the firſt of their number or plenty, the ſecond of their weight, the third of their conſtancy and continuance; for according as they partake more of theſe properties every good is more good, and every evil is more evil. It wil therefore be our beſt method of trial in the preſent caſe, to compare our bleſſings and our calamities in theſe three reſpects.

2. And firſt in that of plenty, the mercies of God are the ſource of all our good, are ſet out to us in holy ſcripture in the moſt *ſuperlative* ſtrein, They are *multitude*, Pſal. 102. 20. *Plenteous redemtion*, Pſal. 130. 7. *as high as the heaven*, Pſal. 103 11. *He fills all things living with plenteouſneſs*, Pſal. 145. 16. His mercies indeed

deed are ſuch as come not within the compaſs of number, but ſtretch themſelves to infinity, and are beſt repreſented by ſuch a calculation as God made to *Abraham*, when he ſhew'd him the numerouſneſs of his poſterity by the innumerableneſs of the ſtars, Gen. 15.5. Were there but a ſingle mercy apportion'd to each minute of our lives, the ſum would ariſe very high: but how is our Arithmetic confounded, when every minute has more then we can diſtinctly number? For beſides the original ſtock mention'd in the laſt ſection, and the acceſſion of new bounty, the giving us ſomewhat which we had not before; what an accumulative mercy is it, the preſerving what we have? We are made up of ſo many pieces, have ſuch varieties of intereſts, ſpiritual, temporal, public, and private; for our ſelves, for our friends, and dependants; that it is not a confuſed general regard that will keep all theſe in ſecurity one moment. We are like a vaſt building, which coſts as much to maintain, as to erect. And indeed conſidering the corruptibleneſs of our materials, our preſervation is no leſs a work of omnipotence, then our firſt forming: nay perhaps tis rather a greater.

Our original clay tho it had no aptneſs, yet it had no averſions to the receiving a human form; but was in the hand of the potter to make it what he pleaſed; but we now have principles of decay within us, which vehemently tend to diſſolution; we want the ſupplies of ſeveral things without us, the failing whereof return us again to our duſt. Nay we do not only need the aid, but we fear the hoſtility of outward things. That very air which ſomtimes refreſhes us, may at another ſtarve and freeze us: that which warms and comforts, has alſo a power of conſuming us. Yea thar very meat which nuriſhes, may choak and ſtifle us. In a word, there is no creature ſo deſpicable, ſo inconſiderable, which may not ſomtimes ſerve us, and which may not at any time (if God permit) ruine us. Now whence is it that we ſo conſtantly, ſo frequently find the good, the benign efficacy of theſe things, and ſo ſeldom, ſo rarely the evil? whence I ſay is it, but from the active unwearied providence, which draws forth the better properties of the creatures for our uſe, and reſtrains the worſer for our ſecurity? which with a particular advertence watches not only over every Perſon,

ſon, but over every ſeveral concern of that perſon. And how aſtoniſhing a contemplation is this? If the mere ebbing and flowing of the ſea, put the Philoſopher into ſuch an extaſy, that he flung himſelf into it becauſe he could not comprehend the inſcrutable cauſe of it; in what perpetual raptures of admiration may we be, who have every minute within us, and about us, more and greater wonders, and thoſe too in our favor, when we deſerve rather the divine power ſhould exert it ſelf in our deſtruction?

3. BUT alas our danger from the viſible creature, is little compar'd with thoſe from the ſpirits of darkneſs. *We wreſtle not only with fleſh and blood, but with Principalities and Powers, with ſpiritual wickedneſs,* &c. Eph. 6. 12. So inveterate is the enmity between the Serpent and the ſeed of the Woman in general, that he watches all advantages againſt us, not only in our ſouls, but even our bodies, our goods, and in every part of our concerns. Thus we ſee he not only aſſaulted *Jobs* ſoul by the wicked inſinuations of his Wife, (with more effect) his body with boiles and ſores, his poſſeſſions by the *Chaldeans* and *Sabeans*, and the i-

mages of himſelf, his deareſt Children, by a wind from the wilderneſs. Job. 1. And can we think his malice is now worn out? no ſurely he ſtill wiſhes as ill to mankind as ever, and we ſhould ſoon ſee the woful effects of it, did not the ſame power which let him looſe for *Jobs* trial, reſtrain him for our ſafety. Nay had he but power to affright, tho not to hurt us, even that would make our lives very uncomfortable. We cannot hear the relation of Sprights or apparitions, but our blood chills upon it, and a horror runs thro our veins: what ſhould we then do if he ſhould make his night-walks thro our chambers, and with his illuſory terrors diſturb our reſt? Yet all this and much more he would do, if God did not chain up this *old Dragon*, Rev. 20. Nay if he were not at the expence of a guard about us, and thoſe no leſs then Angels. I ſhall not diſpute whether every perſon hath not his peculiar Guardian: for tho many have not improbably aſſerted it, we have ground enough of acquieſcence in the general affirmation of the Apoſtle, *that they are all miniſtring Spirits, ſent forth to miniſter for them, who ſhall be heires of Salvation*, Heb. 1. 14. And now if the Reader pleaſe to ſum

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up how many are his concerns, and how many are the dangers which await him in them all, he cannot ſure render the account of thoſe mercies which preſerve the one, and divert the other, in any other phraſe then that of the Pſalmiſt, *They are more then I am able to expreſs*, Pſa. 40. 7.

4. WE may now challenge the moſt miſerable, or the moſt querulous man living, to produce cauſes of complaint, proportionable to thoſe of thanks-giving. He that has the greateſt ſtock of calamities, can never vye with the heaps of benefits; the diſproportion is greater then that of the Armies of *Ahab* and *Benhadad*, 1 Kings. 20. 27. whereof the one was like *two little flocks of Kids*, *the other filled the country*. God has told us that he *afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men*, Lam. 3. 33. whereas on the contrary, he *delighteth in mercy*. Mich. 7. 18. We may judge by our ſelves which he is likelieſt often to repete, thoſe acts which he doth with regret and reluctancy, or thoſe which he do's with pleſure and delight. But we need no inferences where we have the atteſtation of experience. Let every man therefore make this his judge in this caſe, let him every night re-

recollect, how many things within and about him he is concern'd in, and conſider how many of thoſe have bin preſerv'd intire to him, ſtill accounting every thing ſo continued as a new donation. If he begin with his Spiritual ſtate, tis too poſſible he may ſomtimes find he has loſt his innocence, committed ſome, perhaps many ſins: but even in theſe he will find cauſe to juſtify God, if he do but recollect with what inward checks and admonitions, and outward reſtraints, God has endevored to bridle him. If he will break thro thoſe fences, that do's not at all derogate from the mercy of God which ſo guarded him, but it rather illuſtrates his goodneſs, that after ſo many quenchings of his Spirit, do's yet continue its influence. So that even he that has the moſt deplorably violated his integrity, is yet to confeſs that Gods purpoſe was to have preſerv'd it intire: and he might really ſo have kept it, had he compli'd with thoſe aids which were afforded him. But in temporal concerns we are not ſo apt to undermine our ſelves, and therefore ſhall much more rarely find we have ſuffer'd detriment in them, then in our ſpiritual; but are there ordinarily like to meet with a better

better account. Let a man therefore conſider what is lacking to him of all the ſecular good things he had in the morning, and tell me whether for the moſt part he may not give ſuch an account, as the *Iſraelitiſh* officers did of their men after the ſlaughter of the *Midianites*; *that he hath not loſt one.* Num. 31.39. Or if ſomtimes he do ſuffer a diminution, yet at the worſt he will find that many more good things have bin preſerv'd to him, then have bin taken from him. A man may perhaps meet with ſome dammage in his eſtate, yet tis manifold odds that that dammage is but partial, and that he has ſtill more left then is loſt. Or if it be more intire; yet if he have his health, his limbs, his ſenſes, his friends, and all things beſide his eſtate left him, ſo that for one thing he has loſt, he ſtill retains a multitude, he may ſay of it as the Diſciples of the few Loaves, *what is this among ſo many*, Mat.14.17. *Ariſtippus* being bemoan'd for the loſs of a Farm, repli'd with ſome ſharpneſs upon his Condoler, you have but one field, and I have yet three left, why ſhould I not rather grieve for you? intimating that a man is not ſo much to eſtimate what he has loſt, as what he has left. A piece of

of wiſdom which if we would tranſcribe, we might quickly convince ourſelves, that even in our moſt adverſe eſtate there are as *Elijah* ſpeaks, *more with us then againſt us*, 2King.6.16. that our enjoiments are more then our ſufferings, and Gods acts of grace do far out-number thoſe of his ſeverity.

5. And as they do out-number, ſo alſo do they out-weigh them. The mercies we receive from God are (as the laſt Section has ſhew'd) of the greateſt importance; the moſt ſubſtantial ſolid goods; and the greateſt of all, I mean thoſe which concern our eternal ſtate, are ſo firmly fixt on us, that unleſs we will voluntarily quit our clame, tis not in the power of men or devils to defeat us. Light bodies are eaſily blown away by every guſt of wind, but this *weight of glory*, as the Apoſtle calls it, 2 Cor. 4. 17. continues firm and ſtable, is proof againſt all ſtorms, like the *ſhadow of a great rock in a weary Land.* Iſai. 32. 2. Thoſe dark adumbrations we have of it, might have ſerved to refreſh and deceive the tediouſneſs of our pilgrimage, and therefore the moſt formidable calamities of this life are below all meſures of compariſon with this hope of our calling, this *riches of the glory of our inheritance.*

Eph.

Eph. 3. 16. The heavieſt and moſt preſſing of out afflictions are to that, *but like the ſmall duſt of the balance*: Eſa. 40. 15. ſo that if we ſhould here ſtop our inquiſition, we have a ſufficient reſolution of the preſent queſtion, and muſt conclude, that God has given us an abundant counterpoiſe of all, we either do or can ſuffer here.

6. IF therefore there be any ſo forlorn as to temporals, that he can fetch thence no evidence of Gods fatherly care of him, yet this one conſideration may ſolve his doubts, and convince him that he is not abdicated by him. We read of no *gifts Abraham* gave *Iſaac*, yet to the ſons of the concubins tis ſaid he did, Gen. 25. 6. It had bin a very fallacious inference, if *Iſaac* ſhould have concluded himſelf neglected, becauſe his far greater portion was but in reverſions. And it will be the ſame in any of us, if we argue an unkindneſs from any temporal wants who have the entail of an eternal inheritance. But ſurely *God do's not leave himſelf without witneſs*, Act. 14. 17. even in ſecular things; there is no man breathing but has ſome bleſſings of his left hand, as well as his right, as I have already mention'd:

and unleſs it be ſome few prodigies of Calamity, in whoſe puniſhment or patience God deſigns ſignally to glorify himſelf, there are none who enjoy not greater comforts of life then thoſe they want, I mean ſuch as are really greater, tho perhaps, to their prejudicate fancies they do not appear ſo. Thus in point of health, if a man be diſaffected in one part, yet all the reſt of his body may be (and often is) well; or if he have a complication, and have more then one diſeaſe, yet there is no man that has all, or half ſo many as are incident to human bodies, ſo that he is comparatively more healthy then ſick. So again it is not very common for a man to loſe a limb, or ſenſe; the generality of men keep them to their laſt; and they who do, have in that an overbalance to moſt outward adverſities; and even they who are ſo unhappy to loſe one, yet commonly keep the reſt; at leaſt the Major part: or if at any time any man is left a mere breathing trunk, yet it is by ſuch ſtupifying diſeaſes as dead the ſenſe, or ſuch mortal ones as ſoon take them away; and ſo the remedy overtakes the Malady. Beſides it pleaſes God very often, to make com-

compenſation for the want of one member or faculty by improving the uſe of another. We have ſeen feet ſupply all the neceſſary uſes of hands to thoſe who have had none; and it is a thing of daily obſervation that men that are blind, have the greater internal light: have their intellects more vigorous and active, by their abſtractions from viſible objects.

7. Thus alſo it is in the matter of wealth; he that is forced to get his bread by the ſweat of his browes, tis true he cannot have thoſe delicacies wherewith rich men abound; yet his labor helps him to a more poignant, more ſavory ſauce then a whole Colledg of Epicures can compound. His hunger gives a higher guſt to his dry cruſt, then the ſurfeited ſtomach can find in the moſt coſtly, moſt elaborate mixtures: ſo verifying the obſervation of *Solomon*, *the full ſoul loatheth the hony comb, but to the hungry ſoul every bitter thing is ſweet*, Prov. 27. 7. He cannot *indeed ſtretch himſelf upon his bed of Ivory*, Am. 6, 4. yet his ſleeps are ſounder then thoſe that can. The Wiſe man tells us, and experience do's ſo too, that *the ſleep of a laboring man is ſweet*, Eccles. 5. 12. He is not clothed Gorgeouſly,

has not the ſplendor of glittering apparel, ſo neither has he the care of contriving it, the fears of being fore-ſtal'd in a new invention, or any of thoſe unmanly ſolicitudes which attend that vanity. He has the proper genuine uſe of clothing; the preventing ſhame and cold, and is happily determin'd to that which the wiſer men of the world have voluntarily choſen. To conclude, he has one advantage beyond all theſe; his neceſſities reſcue him from idleneſs, and all its conſequent temtations; which is ſo great a benefit, that if rich men be not their own task-maſters as his wants are his, if they do not provide themſelves of buſineſs, that one want of theirs is infinitly more deplorable then all his: and he is not only happy comparatively with himſelf, in having better things then he wants, but with them alſo.

8. If we come now to reputation and fame, the account will be much the ſame, he that is eminent in the world for ſome great atchievement, is ſet up as an object of every mans remark; when as his excellencies on the one hand are viſible, ſo his faults and blemiſhes are on the other. And as human frailty makes it too pro-

probable theſe later will be really more, ſo human envy makes it ſure that they ſhall be more preciſely, more curiouſly obſerved, and more loudly blazon'd. So that upon the whole, a good quiet ſecurity, tho it be not the road to glory, yet is the likelieſt fence againſt infamy. And indeed he that can keep up the repute of a ſober integrity within his own private ſphere, need not envy the triumphant ſallies of others, which often meet with a fatal turn at the later end of the day. But twill be ſaid that even that more moderate ſort of reputation is not every mans portion, but that many lie under great ignominy and ſcandals. I ſhall here ask whether thoſe be juſt or unjuſt: If they be juſt they belong not to our preſent ſubject, which relates only to thoſe inflictions which are the effects of Gods immediate providence, not of our own crimes; for I never doubted but that by thoſe we may diveſt our ſelves of any, nay of all the good things God has deſign'd us. But if the obloquy be unjuſt, 'tis probable that 'tis taken up only by ill men, and that the good paſs a more equitable ſentence; and then ſurely the atteſtation of a few ſuch, is able to outweigh

weigh a multitude of the others. And in this caſe a man may not only find patience but pleſure in reproches. *Socrates* lookt with trouble and jealouſy on himſelf when ill men commended him, ſaying, What ill have I don? and ſure a Chriſtian has a farther reaſon to be pleas'd with their revilings, they being his ſecurity againſt the *woe* pronounc'd to thoſe *whom all men ſpeak well of*, Luke 6. 26. But ſomtimes it happens, that even good men are ſeduc'd, and either by the artifices of the wicked, or their own too haſty credulity, give credit to unjuſt reports. And this I confeſs is a ſharp trial to the injur'd perſon, yet even this cannot often be univerſal; there can ſcarce be any innocence ſo forlorn but that there may be opportunities of clearing it to ſome or other, and by them propagating it to more, and if the cloud ever come to be diſpers'd their fame will appear with the brighter luſter. But if none of this happen, they have yet a certain and more bleſſed retreat, even an appeal to the unerring judg, who never beholds us with more approbation, then when we are under the unjuſt condemnation of men. Indeed we have then a double tie upon him,

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not only his juſtice but his pity is concern'd in our cauſe. God particulary owns himſelf as the refuge of the oppreſſed, and there is ſcarce a ſharper and more ſenſible oppreſſion then this of Calumny: yet even this proves advantage, whilſt it procures Gods immediate patronage, makes us the objects of his more peculiar care and compaſſion, who can *make our righteouſneſs as clear as the light*, Pſa. 37. 6. if he ſee it fit; but if in his wiſdom he chuſe not that for us, 'tis comfort enough for us that we have approv'd it to him. Twas *Elkanahs* queſtion to *Hannah* in her diſconſolation, *Am not I better to thee then ten Sons?* 1 Sam. 1. 8. And ſure we may ſay the like of Gods approbation, that tis better to us, I ſay not then ten, but ten thouſand Eulogies of men. The very Echo of it in the teſtimony of a good conſcience is an unſpeakable comfort, and this voice ſounds more audibly, more ſweetly, among the loudeſt, the harſheſt accuſations of men. So that we ſee even this aſſault too is not without its guard, & theſe *waters of Marah*, Exo. 15. 23. may be render'd not only wholeſom but pleſant.

9. I have now inſtanced in the three moſt general concerns of human life, the Body,

Body, Goods, and Fame, to which heads may be reduced moſt of the afflictions incident to our out-ward ſtate, as far as immediately concerns our ſelves. But there is no man ſtands ſo ſingle in the world, but he has ſome relations or friends in which he thinks himſelf intereſſed, and many times thoſe oblique ſtrokes which wound us thro them, are as painful as the more direct: yet here alſo God is ordinarily pleas'd to provide ſome allaies, if we would but take notice of them. He who has had one friend die, has ordinarily divers others ſurviving; or if he have not that, uſually God raiſes him up others. Tis true we cannot have a ſucceſſion of Fathers and Mothers, yet we often have of other friends that are no leſs helpful to us: and indeed there are ſcarce in any thing more remarkable evidences of Providence, then in this particular. *He that is able out of ſtones to raiſe up children to Abraham*, Mat. 3. 9. do's many times by as unexpected a production ſupply friends to the deſolate. But we do ſometimes loſe our friends while they are living, they withdraw their kindneſs which is the ſoul of friendſhip: and if this happen by our own demerit, we can accuſe nei-

neither God nor them for it: nor can we rationally expect that God ſhall provide ſupplies, when we wilfully deſpoile our ſelves. Bnt when they are unkind without provocation, then is the ſeaſon for his interpoſition, who uſes to take up *thoſe whom Father and Mother forſake*, Pſa. 27. 10. and we frequently ſee ſignal proofs of his care in exciting the compaſſions of other friends and relatives, or perhaps of mere ſtrangers. Nay ſomtimes God makes the inhumanity of a mans relations, the occaſion of his advantage. Thus the barbarous malice of *Joſephs* brethen was the firſt ſtep to his Dominion over Egypt. And it is a common obſervation in Families, that the moſt diſcoutenanc'd child oft makes better proof, then the dearling.

10. We are yet liable to a third affliction by the calamity of our friends, which by the Sympathy of Kindneſs preſſes us no leſs (perhaps more) ſenſibly then our own: but then tis to be conſider'd, that theirs are capable of the ſame allaying circumſtances that ours are, and God has the ſame arts of alleviating their burdens; ſo that we have the ſame arguments for acquieſcence in their ſufferings

that we have in our own, and ſhall do a more friendly office in impreſſing thoſe upon them, then in the moſt paſſionate adopting their ſorrows.

11. The laſt and greateſt diſcomfort from friends, is that of their ſin: and if ever we may be allow'd that diſconſolate ſtrein of the Prophet, Eſa. 22. 4. *Turn away from me, I will weep bitterly, labor not to comfort me*; this ſeems to be the time: yet even this *vally of Achor is not without a door of hope*, Hoſ. 2. 15. A vicious perſon may be recalled, multitudes have bin; ſo that as long as God continues life, we ought no more to depoſite our hope, then to quit our endevor. Beſides there are few that make this complaint that have not ſomthing to balance, or at leaſt to lighten it. I ſhall inſtance in that relation which is the neareſt and moſt tender, that of a Parent. He that has one bad child may have divers good. If he have but one virtuous tis a very great mercy, and tis another that he may be the better taught to value it by the oppoſition of the contrary. But if any be ſo unhappy as to have many children, and *all to conſume his eies and grieve his heart*, 1 Sam. 2. 33. it may be a ſeaſonable reflexion for

for him to examin how far he has contributed to it either by *Elies* fond indulgence; or by a remiſs and careleſs education: or which is worſt of all, by his moſt impious example. If any, or all of thoſe be found the cauſe, he is not ſo much to ſeek for allaies to his grief, as for pardon of his ſin: and when he has penitently retracted his own fault, he may then have better ground of hope that God may reform thoſe of his children. In the mean time he may look on his own affliction in them as Gods diſcipline on him, and gather at leaſt this comfort from it, that his heavenly Father has more care of him, then he had of his; and do's not leave him uncorrected.

12. Thus we ſee in all the concerns (which are the moſt common and important of human life, and wherein the juſteſt of our complaints are uſually founded) there is ſuch a temperature and mixture, that the good do's more then equal the ill, and not only in the groſſer bulk, when our whole ſtate is weighed together, but in every ſingle branch of it; God having herein dealt with this little world Man, as he has don with the greater, wherein he is obſerv'd to have

furniſhed every country with Specific remedies for their peculiar diſeaſes. I have only given theſe ſhort hints by way of eſſay and pattern for the Readers contemplation, which when he ſhall have extended to all thoſe more minute particulars wherein he is eſpecially concern'd, more curiouſly compar'd his ſufferings with his allaies and comforts; I cannot doubt but he will own himſelf an inſtance of the truth of the preſent Theſis, and confeſs, that he has much more cauſe of thankfulneſs then complaint.

13. THIS I ſay ſuppoſing his afflictions to be of thoſe more ſolid and conſiderable ſorts I have before mention'd. But how many are there who have few or none of ſuch, who ſeem to be ſeated in the land of *Goſhen*, in a place exemt from all the plagues that infect their Neighbors? And thoſe one would think ſhould give a ready ſuffrage to this concluſion, as having no temtation to opugn it; yet I doubt tis far otherwiſe, and that ſuch men are of all the moſt unſatisfied. For tho they have no croſſes of Gods impoſing, they uſully create a multitude to themſelves: And here we may ſay with *David*, *it is better to fall into the hand of God, then into*

to the hand of man, 2 Sam. 24. 14. tis easier to bear the afflictions God ſends, then thoſe we make to our ſelves. His are limited both for quantity and quality, but our own are as boundleſs as thoſe extravagant deſires from which they ſpring.

14. And this is the true cauſe why contentment is ſo much a ſtranger to thoſe who have all the outward cauſes of it, they have no definite meſure of their deſires; tis not the ſupply of all their real wants will ſerve their turn, their appetites are precarious and depend upon contingencies. They hunger not becauſe they are emty, but becauſe others are full. Many a man could have liked his own portion well enough, had he not ſeen another have ſomthing he liked better. Nay even the moſt inconſiderable things acquire a value by being anothers, when we deſpiſe much greater of our own. *Ahab* might well have ſatisfied himſelf with the Kingdom of *Iſrael*, had not *Naboths* poor plot lain in his eie: but ſo raving were his deſires after it, that he diſreliſhes all the pomps of a Crown, yea the ordinary refreſhment of Nature, *can eat no bread* till he have that to furniſh him with Sallads, 1 King. 21. 2. And how many

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are there now adaies whoſe clothes ſit uneaſy, if they ſee another have had but the luck to be a little more ingeniouſly vain; whoſe meat is unſavory if they have ſeen but a greater rarity, a newer cookery at anothers Table; in a word who make other peoples exceſſes the ſtandard of their own felicities.

15. NOR are our appetites only excicited thus by our outward objects, but precipitated and hurried on by our inward luſts. The proud man ſo longs for homage and adoration, that nothing can pleaſe him if that be wanting. *Haman* can find no guſt in all the ſenſualities of the Perſian Court, becauſe a poor deſpicable Jew denies his abaiſance, Eſt 15.13. The luſtful ſo impatiently purſues his impure deſigns, that any difficulty he meets in them, makes him pine and languiſh like *Amnon*, who could no way recover his own health but by violating his ſiſters honor, 2 Sam.13. 14. The revengeful labors under an Hydropic thirſt till he have the bloud of his enemy: all the liquor of *Abſoloms* ſheep-ſheering could not quench his, without the ſlaughter of his brother, 2 Sam.i.29. And thus every one of our paſſions keeps us upon the rack till they have ob-

obtained their designs. Nay when they have, the very emtineſs of thoſe acquiſitions is a new torment, and puts us upon freſh purſuits. Thus between the impetuouſneſs of our deſires, and the emtineſs of our enjoiments, we ſtill *diſquiet our ſelves in vain*, Pſa. 39. 7. And whilſt we have ſuch cruel task-maſters, tis not ſtrange to find us groaning under our burdens. If we will indulge to all our vicious or fooliſh appetites, think our lives bound up with them, and ſolicite the ſatisfaction of them with as impatient a vehemence, as *Rachel* did for children, Gen. 30. 1. *give me them or I die*: no wonder that we are alwaies complaining of diſappointments, ſince in theſe the very ſucceſs is a defeat, and is but the exchangeing the pain of a craving ravenous ſtomach, for that of a cloi'd and nauſeated. Indeed men of this temper condemn themſelves to a perpetual reſtleſsneſs, they are like phantaſtic mutineers, who when their ſuperiors ſend them blanks to write their own conditions, know not what will pleaſe them: and even Omnipotence it ſelf cannot ſatisfy theſe till it have new moulded them, and reduced their deſires to a certainty.

16. BUT

16. But in the mean time how unjustly do they accuse God of illiberality, because every thing answers not their humor? He has made them reasonable creatures, and has provided them satisfactions proportionable to their nature; but if they will have wild irrational expectations, neither his wisdom, nor his goodness is concern'd to satisfy those. His supplies are real and solid, and therefore have no correspondence to imaginary wants. If we will create such to our selves, why do we not create an imaginary satisfaction to them? Twere the merrier frenzy of the two, to be like the mad *Athenian* that thought all the ships that came into the harbor his own: and 'twere better *Ixion* like to have our Arms fill'd with a cloud, then to have them perpetually beating our own breasts, and be still tormenting our selves with unsatisfiable desires. Yet this is the state to which men voluntarily subject themselves, and then quarrel at God because they will not let themselves be happy. But sure their very complaints justify God, and argue that he has dealt very kindly with them, and afforded them all the necessary accommodations of life: for did they want them,

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they would not be ſo ſenſible of the want of the other. He that is at perfect eaſe may feel with ſome vexation the biting of a flea or gnat, which would not be at all obſervable if he were upon the rack. And ſhould God change the ſcene, and make theſe nice people feel the deſtitution of neceſſaries; all theſe regrets about ſuperfluities would be over-whelmed. In the mean time how deplorable a thing is it, that we are ſtill the poorer for Gods bounty, that thoſe to whom he has opened his hand wideſt, ſhould open their mouth ſo too, in out-cries and murmurs? For I think I may ſay that generally, thoſe that are the fartheſt remov'd from want, are ſo from content too; they take no notice of all the real ſubſtantial bleſſings they enjoy, leave theſe (like the ninety nine ſheep in the wilderneſs) forgotten and neglected, to go in queſt after ſome fugitive ſatisfaction, which like a ſhadow flies ſtill faſter in proportion to their purſuit.

17. AND now would God they could be recalled from this unprofitable chace, and inſtead of the Horſleeches note, *Give, give*, Prov. 30. 15. take up that of the Pſalmiſt, *what ſhall I render to the Lord*

for all the benefits he hath don unto me? Psa. 116. 12. Let them count how many valuable or rather inestimable things, they have received from his mercy, and then confront them with those corrections they have found from his justice; and if they do this impartially, I doubt not they will find wherewithall to check their highest mutinies; and will join with me in confessing, that their good things abundantly out-weigh their ill.

18. If now we carry on the comparison to the last circumstance, and consider the constancy, we shall find as wide a difference. Let us take the Psalmists testimony, and there will appear a very distant date of his mercies and punishments. *His mercies endure for ever,* Psal. 156. whereas his wrath *endures but the twinkling of an eie,* Psal. 30. 5. And accordingly God owns his acts of severity as his *strange work,* Isa. 28. 21. that which he resorts to only upon special emergencies; but his mercies *are renewed every morning,* Lam. 3. 25. and doubtless we may all upon trial affirm the same. There are many of the most necessary comforts of life which do not only somtimes visit us as guests, but dwell with us as inmates and domestics. How many

many are there who have lived in a perpetual affluence from their cradles to their graves, have never known what it is to want? And tho the goods of fortune are perhaps leſs conſtant to ſome, yet the refreſhments of nature are uſually ſo to us all. We eat and drink, we ſleep, we recreate, we converſe in a continued circle, and go our round almoſt as conſtantly as the ſun do's his. [Or if God do's ſomtimes a little interrupt us in it, put ſome ſhort reſtraint upon our refreſhments, yet that comparatively to the time we enjoy them, is but proportionable to the ſtop he has ſomtimes made of the Sun, Joſ. 10. 13. 2 Kings 20. 8. or of the ſea, Exod. 14. 21. which as they were no ſubverſions of the courſe of nature, ſo neither are thoſe ſhort pauſes he ſomtimes makes, a repeal of thoſe fixt and cuſtomary benefits his providence uſually allots us. But who is there can ſay that any one of his afflictions has bin of equal continuance, or has preſt him with ſo few intermiſſions? Perhaps he may have miſt ſome few nights ſleep: but what is that to a twelve-months, or perhaps a whole lives enjoing it? Tis poſſible his ſtomach and his meat have not alwaies bin ready to-

gether; but how much oftner have they met to his delight? and generally thoſe things that are moſt uſeful, are but rarely interrupted. Nay to a great many even the delicacies of life are no leſs conſtant, and their luxuries are as quotidian as their bread: whereas unleſs their vices or their fancies create uneaſineſſes to them, thoſe that come immediately from Gods hand, make long intermiſſions and ſhort ſtaies. Yet for all this they that ſhould meſure by the unceſſantneſs of mens complaints, would judg that the ſcene was quite reverſt, and that our good things are as *Job* ſpeaks, *ſwifter then a weavers ſhuttle*, Job. 7. 6. whilſt our ill, like *Gehazies Leproſy*, *cleave inſeparably to us*, 2 King. 5. 10.

19. The truth is we will not let our ſelves enjoy thoſe intervals God allowes us, but when a calamity do's retire we will ſtill keep it in fiction and imagination; revolve it in our minds, and becauſe it ts poſſible it may return, look upon it as not gon. Like Aguiſh patients we count our ſelves ſick on our well-day, becauſe we expect a fit the next. A ſtrange ſtupid folly thus to court vexation, and be miſerable in Chimera. Do's any man

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or indeed any beaſt deſire to keep a diſtaſtful reliſh ſtill in his mouth, to chew the cud upon gall and wormwood? yet certainly there are a multitude of people whoſe lives are imbitter'd to them merely by theſe fantaſtic imaginary ſufferings. Nor do we only fright our ſelves with images and Ideas of paſt calamities, but we dreſs up new bugbears and mormoes, are Poetic and aerial in our inventions, and lay Romantic ſcenes of diſtreſſes. This is a thing very incident to jealous natures, who are alwaies raiſing alarms to themſelves. A ſuſpicious man looks on every body with dread. One man he fears has deſigns upon his fortune, another on his reputation, perhaps a third upon his life: whilſt in the mean time, the only ill deſign againſt him is managed by himſelf; his own cauſeleſs fears and jealouſies which put him in a ſtate of hoſtility with all the world; and do often betray him to the very things he groundleſly ſuſpected. For it is not ſeldom ſeen that men have incurr'd real miſchiefs by a fond ſolicitude of avoiding imaginary ones. I do not queſtion but this is a ſtate calamitous enough, and ſhall acknowledg it very like-

likely that ſuch perſons ſhall have little or no truce from their troubles, who have ſuch an exhauſted ſpring within themſelves; yet we may ſay to them as the Prophet did to the houſe of *Jacob*, *Is the ſpirit of the Lord ſtraitned? are theſe his doings?* Mich. 2. 7. Such men muſt not cry out that Gods hand lies heavy upon them, but their own; and ſo can be no impeachment to the truth of our obſervation, that Gods bleſſings are of a longer duration, keep a more fixt ſteddy courſe then his puniſhments. The reſult of all is, that the generality of mankind have good things (even as to temporals) which do in the three reſpects fore-mention'd exceed the ill. I mean the true and real ills which God ſends, tho not thoſe fanciful ones they raiſe to themſelves.

20. And now why ſhould it not appear a reaſonable propoſition that men ſhould entertain themſelves with the pleſanter parts of Gods diſpenſations to them, and not alwaies pore upon the harſher: eſpecially ſince the former are ſo much a fairer object, and perpetually in their eie, why ſhould we look on the

the more ſadning ſpectacles of human frailty or misfortune, thro all the magnifying optics our fancies can ſupply, and perverſly turn away our eies from the chearfuller? Yet this God knows is too much the caſe with moſt of us. How nicely and critically do we obſerve every little adverſe accident of our lives? what tragical ſtories of them do our memories preſent us with? When alas a whole current of proſperity glides by without our notice. Like little children our fingers are never off the ſore place, till we have pickt every light ſcratch into an Ulcer. Nay like the leuder ſort of beggers, we make artificial ſores to give us a pretence of complaint. And can we then expect God ſhould concern himſelf in the cure? Indeed in the courſe of his ordinary providence there is no cure for ſuch people, unleſs it be by revulſion, the making them feel the ſmart of ſome very great and preſſing affliction. They therefore put themſelves under an unhappy dilemma, either to continue their own tormenaors, or to endure the ſevereſt conrſe of Gods diſcipline. Tis true the laſt is the more eli-

eligible, but I am ſure the beſt way is to prevent both, by a juſt and grateful ſenſe of Gods mercies, which will be yet farther illuſtrated if we compare them with our own demerits.

SECT.

Of our Demerit towards God.

SECT. V.

1. IT is the common fault of our nature, that we are very apt to be partial to our ſelves, and to ſquare our expectations more by what we wiſh, then by what we deſerve. Somthing of this is viſible in our dealings with men. We oft *look to reap where we have not ſowed,* Mat. 25. 25. expect benefits where we do none: yet in civil tranſactions there are ſtill remaining ſuch footſteps of natural juſtice, that we are not univerſally ſo unreaſonable: all traffic and commerce ſubſiſting upon the principle of equal retribution, giving one good thing for another equivalent; ſo that no man expects to buy corn with chaff, or Gold with droſs. But in our dealings with God, we put off even this common equity; are vaſt in our expectations, but penurious and baſe in our returns; and as if God were our ſteward not our Lord, we require of him with a confidence proper only to thoſe who ask their

own: whilst in the interim, what we offer to him is with such a disdainful slightness, as if we meant it rather an alms then an homage.

2. God indeed is so munificent, that he *prevents us with his blessings*, Psal. 21. 3. gives us many things before we ask: had he not don so we could not have bin so much as in a capacity of asking. But tho the first & fundamental mercies are absolute and free, yet the subsequent are conditional: and accordingly we find in scripture, that God makes no promise either concerning this life or a better, but on condition of Obedience. The Jews who had much larger proposals of temporal happiness then Christians have, yet never had them upon other terms. God expressly articled for the performance of his commands, and made all their enjoiments forfeitable upon the failure, as we may see at large in the book of Deuteronomy. And under the Gospel, St. *Paul* appropriates the *promises as well of this life as of that to come unto godliness*, 1. Tim. 4. 8. It will therefore be a material inquiry for every man, whether he have kept his title entire and have not by breach of the condition forfeited his clame, even to the most common

mon ordinary bleſſings; for if he have, common reaſon will tell him he can challenge none: and that the utmoſt he can hope for, muſt be only upon a new ſcore of unmerited favor.

3. And here certainly *every mouth muſt be ſtopped, and all the world become guilty before God*, Rom. 3. 19. For alas who is there that can ſay his obedience has bin in any degree proportionable to his obligation? Tis manifeſt we have all received abundantly from Gods hand, but what has he had from ours? I may challenge the beſt man, to caſt up the account of his beſt day, and tell me whether his receits have not infinitly exceeded his diſburſments: whether for any one good thing he has don, he has not received many. Nor is the diſparity only in number, but much more in value. Gods works are perfect, all he do's for us like the firſt 6 daies productious, *are all very good*, Gen. 1. but alas our very *righteouſneſs is as filthy rags*, Eſai. 64. 6. We offer *him the blind and the lame*, Mal. 1. 9. a few yawning drowſy praiers perhaps, wherein he has the leaſt ſhare: the fuller current of our thoughts running towards our ſecular or ſinful concerns. We drop it may be a ſcanty Alms,

wherein tis odds our vain-glory ſcrambles for a ſhare with him, if it do not wholly ingroſs it. We ſit an hour at a ſermon, but tis rather to hear the wit or eloquence of the preacher, then the word of God. Like the duller ſort of animals, we like well to have our itching ears ſcratcht, but grow ſturdy and reſtive when we ſhould do what we are there taught. In a word all our ſervices at the beſt are miſerably maim'd and imperfect; and too often corrupt and unſound. So that God may well upbraid us as he did *Iſrael*, *Offer it now to thy governor, will he be pleas'd with it?* Mal. 1.1. Theſe very iniquities of our holy things, are enough to defeat all our pretences to any good from Gods hand. Yet God knows this is much the beſt ſide of us: tis not every one that can make ſo fair an appearance as this amounts to. With many, there is no place to complain of the blemiſhes of their ſacrifices, for they offer none; of whom we may ſay in the words of the Pſalmiſt, *God is not in all their thoughts*, Pſal. 10. 4. I fear there want not thoſe who drive away the day, the week, nay the year, without remembring in whoſe *hand their time is*, Pſal. 31. 18. or paying him any ſolemn tribute

of

of it; who enjoy the ſervices of all inferior creatures, without conſidering that theirs are more due to the ſupreme Lord: in a word, who live as if they were abſolutely independent; had their exiſtence purely from themſelves, and had no Creator to whom they owed their being, or any conſequent duty. And ſure men who thus diſcard themſelves from Gods family, have very little reaſon to expect the proviſions of it: yet even ſuch as theſe have the impudence to complain, if any thing be wanting to their needs (ſhall I ſay) or to their luſts; can ravingly profane Gods name in their impatiencies, which they know not how to uſe in their praiers: as if the Deity were conſiderable in no other notion, then that of their caterer or ſteward.

4. IF now we ſeriouſly reflect, what can be more admirable then that infinit patience of God; who notwithſtanding the miſerable infirmities of the pious, and the leud contemt of the impious, ſtill goes on reſolutly in his bounty, and continues to all mankind ſome, and to ſome all his temporal bleſſings? He has no obligation of juſtice to do ſo, for it is no part of his compact; he has none of gratitude,

titude, for he is perpetually affronted and disobliged. Surely we may well say with *David*, *Is this after the manner of men, O Lord?* 1 Chro. 17. 17. Can the highest human indulgence bear any proportion with this divine Clemency? no certainly, no finite patience but would be exhausted with the thousandth part of our provocations.

5. But is not our dealing too as little after the manner of men; I mean of reasonable creatures? For us who have forfeited our right to all, and yet by mere favor are still kept in the possession of many great blessings: for us to grow mutinous, because there is perhaps somthing more trifling which is deni'd us, is such a stupid ingratitude, as one would think impossible to human nature. Should a Tenant with us have at once forfeited his lease, and maliciously affronted his Landlord, he would sure think himself very gently dealt with, if he were suffer'd to enjoy but a part of his first estate; but we should think him not only insolent, but mad, who when the whole were left him, should quarrel & clamor if he might not have his Cottage adorn'd with marble floors, and guilded roofs. Yet at this wild rate

rate we behave our ſelves to our great Landlord, grow pettiſh and angry if we have not every thing we can fancy, tho we enjoy many more uſeful, merely by his indulgence. And can there be any thing imagin'd more unreaſonable? Let us therefore if not for piety, yet at leaſt to juſtify our clame to rationality, be more ingenuous; let us not conſult only with our fond appetites, and be thus perpetually ſoliciting their ſatisfaction; but rather reflect on what tenure we hold what we already have, even that of ſuperabundant mercy; and fear, leaſt like inſolent beggers by the impudence of our demands we divert even that charity which was deſign'd us. In ſhort let every man when he computes what he wants of his deſires, reckon as exactly how much he is ſhort of his duty; and when he has duly ponder'd both, he will think it a very gentle compoſition to have the one unſupplied, ſo he may have the other remitted; and will ſee cauſe contentedly to ſit down and ſay with honeſt *Mephibosheth*, *What right have I to cry any more unto the King?* 2 Sam. 19. 28. But if it be thus with us upon the mere ſcore of our imperfections or omiſſions, what an obnoxious ſtate do our

our innumerable actual ſins put us in? If the ſpots of our ſacrifices are provoking, what are our ſacrileges and bold profanations? If thoſe who neglect or forget God are liſted among his enemies, what are thoſe who avowedly defy him? Indeed he that ſoberly conſiders the world, and ſees how daringly the divine Majeſty is daily affronted, cannot but wonder that the perverſions of our manners, thoſe prodigies in morality, ſhould not be anſwer'd with as great prodigies in calamity too; that we ſhould ever have other ruin then that of *Sodom*, or the earth ſerve us for any other purpoſe then to be, as it was to *Korah*, Num. 16. our living ſepulcher.

6. NOR is this longanimity of God obſervable only towards the maſs and collective body of mankind, but to every man in particular. Who is there that if he ranſack his conſcience, ſhall not find guilts enow to juſtify God in the utmoſt ſeverities towards him? ſo that how much ſoever his puniſhments are ſhort of that, ſo much he evidently owes to the lenity and compaſſion of God. And who is there that ſuffers in this world the utmoſt that God can inflict? We have a great many ſuffering capacities, and if thoſe were

were all fill'd up to the height, our condition would ſcarce differ from that of the damned in any thing but duration. But God is more merciful, and never inflicts at that rate on us here. Every mans experience can tell him, that God diſcharges not his whole quiver at once upon him, but exemts him in many more particulars then he afflicts him; & yet the ſame experience will probably tell moſt of us, that we are not ſo modeſt in our aſſaults upon God; we attacque him in all his concerns (as far as our feeble malice can reach) in his Soveraignty, in his honor, in his relatives, nay ſomtimes in his very eſſence and being. And as they are univerſal in reſpect of him, ſo alſo in regard of our ſelves: we engage all our powers in this war, do not only *yield* (as the Apoſtle ſpeaks) *our members inſtruments of unrighteouſneſs*, Rom. 6. 18. but we preſs them upon the ſervice of ſenſual and vile luſts, even beyond our native propenſions. Nor are only the members of our body, but the faculties of our ſouls alſo thus emploied; our underſtandings are buſied firſt in contriving ſins, and then excuſes and diſguiſes for them; our wills are yet more ſturdy rebels, and when the underſtand-

ing is beat out of all its out-works, yet ſullenly keep their hold in ſpight of all conviction; and our affections madly ruſh on *like the horſe into the battel*, Jer. 8. 6. deterred by nothing of danger, ſo there be but ſin enough in the attemt.

7. AND now with what face can people that thus purſue an hoſtility, expect that it ſhould not be return'd to them? do's any man denounce war, and yet expect from his adverſary all the careſſes, the obligements of friendſhip? ſelf-defence will promt even the meekeſt nature to deſpoile his enemy at leaſt of thoſe things which he uſes to his annoiance; and if God ſhould give way even to that loweſt degree of anger, where or what were we? for ſince we employ our whole ſelves againſt him, nothing but deſtruction can avert our injuries. But tis happy for us we have to do with one who cannot fear us, who knows the impotence of our wild attemts, and ſo allai's his reſentment of our inſolence, with his pity of our follies. Were it not for this, we ſhould not be left in a poſſibility ſo oft to iterate our provocations; every wicked imagination and black deſign, would be at once defeated and puniſht by infatuation

on and frenzy: every blaſphemous Atheiſtical ſpeech would wither the tongue, like that *arm* of *Jeroboam* which he ſtretcht againſt the Prophet, 2 King. 13. 4. and every impious act would like the prohibited retroſpect of *Lot*s Wife, fix us perpetual monuments of divine vengeance.

8. And then how much do we owe to the mercy and commiſeration of our God, that *he ſuffers not his whole diſpleſure to ariſe*, Pſa. 78. 39. that he abates any thing of that juſt ſeverity he might uſe toward us? He that is condemned to the Gallowes, would think it a mercy to ſcape with any inferior penalty: why have we then ſuch mean thoughts of Gods Clemency, when he deſcends to ſuch low compoſitions with us? corrects us ſo lightly as if twere only matter of ceremony & punctilio, i the regard of his honor, rather then the execution of his wrath. For alas let him among us that is the moſt innocent, & undeſervedly afflicted, muſter up his ſins and ſufferings, and he will ſee a vaſt inequality: and (had he not other grounds of aſſurance) would be almoſt temted to think thoſe were not the provoking cauſe, they are ſo unproportionably anſwered. He ſins in innumerable inſtances, and is

puniſht in few; he ſins habitually and perpetually, and ſuffers rarely and ſeldom; nay perhaps he has ſomtimes ſin'd with greedineſs, and yet God has puniſht with regret and reluctancy. *How ſhall I give thee up, O Ephraim?* Hoſ. 11. 8. And when all theſe diſparities are conſider'd, we muſt certainly join heartily in *Ezras* confeſſion, *Thon O God has puniſht us leſs then our iniquities deſerve*, Ezra. 9. 13.

9. NAY beſides all our antecedent, we have after guilts no leſs provoking, I mean our ungracious repinings at the light chaſtiſements of our former ſins, our out-cries upon every little uneaſineſs, which may juſtly cauſe God to turn our whips into ſcorpions; and according as he threatned *Iſrael*, Lev. 26. 18. *to puniſh us yet ſeven times more.* And yet even this do's not immediately exaſperate him. The Jews were an inſtance how long he could bear with a murmuring generation; but certainly we of this nation are a greater: *yet let us not be high minded but fear*, Rom. 11. 20. for we ſee at laſt the doom fell heavy tho it was protracted: a ſucceſſion of miraculous judgments purſued thoſe murmurers, ſo that not one of them enter'd Canaan. And its very ob-

obſervable, that whereas to other ſins Gods denunciations are in ſcripture conditional and reverſible; this was abſolute and bound with an oath, *He ſware in his wrath that they ſhould not enter into his reſt*, Pſal. 95. 11. And yet if we compare the hardſhips of the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs with moſt of our ſufferings, we ſhall be forced to confeſs our mutinies have leſs temtation, and conſequently leſs excuſe; from whence tis very reaſonable to infer, as the greatneſs of our danger if we perſiſt, ſo the greatneſs of Gods long ſuffering towards us, who yet allows us ſpace to reform: and ſure new complaints ſound very ill from us, who are liable to ſo ſevere an account for our old ones. I fear the moſt reſign'd perſons of us will upon recollection find, they have upon one occaſion or other out-vied the number of the Iſraelites murmurs, therefore unleſs we will emulate them in their plagues, let us fear to add one more, leſt that make up the fatal ſum, and render our deſtruction irrevocable.

10. UPON all theſe conſiderations it appears how little reaſon any of us have to repine at our heavieſt preſſures. But there is yet a farther circumſtance to be adverted

adverted to, and is too applicable to many of us, that is, that our ſins are not only the conſtant meritorious cauſe of our ſufferings, but they are alſo very often the inſtrumental cauſe alſo; and produce them not only by way of retaliation from God, but by a natural efficacy. *Solomon* tells us he that *loves pleſure, ſhall be a poor man*, and that *a whorish woman will bring a man to a piece of bread*, Prov. 9. 26. *that he that ſits long at the wine ſhall have redneſs of eies*, Chap. 23. 29. 30. *that the ſlothful ſoul ſhall ſuffer hunger*, 19. 15. and all theſe not by immediate ſupernatural infliction from God, but as the proper genuine effects of thoſe reſpective vices. Indeed God in his original eſtabliſhment of things, has made ſo cloſe a connexion between ſin and puniſhment, that he is not often put to exert his power in any extraordinary way, but may truſt us to be our own Lictors, our own *backſlidings reprove us*, Jer. 2. 19. *and our iniquities are* of themſelves enough to *become our ruine*, Exod. 18. 38.

11. It may therefore be a ſeaſonable queſtion for every man to put to himſelf, whether the troubles he labors under be not of this ſort; whether the poverty he com-

complains of, be not the effect of his riot and profuſion, his ſloth and negligence? whether when he cries out that *his comelineſs is turn'd into corruption*, Dan. 10. 8. he may not anſwer himſelf, that they are his viſits to the harlots houſe which have thus made *rottenneſs enter into his bones*, Hab. 3:16. whether when he is beſet with contentions, and has wounds without cauſe, *he have not tarried long at the wine*; when he has loſt his friend, whether he have not by ſome *trecherous wound*, Eccl. 22. 22. forced him to depart: or when he lies under infamy, whether it be not only the Echo of his own ſcandalous crimes. If he find it thus with him, certainly his mouth is ſtopt, and he cannot without the moſt diſingenuous impudence complain of any but himſelf. He could not be ignorant that ſuch effects did naturally attend ſuch cauſes, and therefore if he would take the one, he muſt take the other alſo. No man ſure can be ſo mad, as to think God ſhould work miracles (diſunite thoſe things which nature hath conjoin'd) only that he may ſin at eaſe, have all the beſtial pleſures he can project, and none of the conſequent ſmart. We read indeed God divided the ſea, but

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it was to make *the way for the Ranſomed of the Lord to paſs over*, Iſa. 51. 10. thoſe who were his own people, and went in at his command; but when they were ſecured, we find the waters immediatly return'd to their chanel, and overwhelmed the Egyptians, who ventured without the ſame warrant. And ſure the caſe is alike here, when any man can produce Gods mandate for him to run into all exceſs of riot, to deſecrate the temple of the holy Ghoſt, *and make his body the member of an harlot*, 1 Cor. 6. 15. In a word when God bids him do any of thoſe things, which God and good men abhor, then and not before he may hope he may ſever ſuch acts from their native penal effects; for till then (how profuſe ſoever ſome Legendary ſtories repreſent him) he will certainly never ſo beſtow his miracles.

12. But I fear upon ſcrutiny there will appear a yet farther circumſtance upon which to arraign our mutinies; for tho it be unreaſonable enough to charge God with the ill effects of our own leudneſs, yet tis a higher ſtep to murmur becauſe we have not materials to be wicked enough. And this I fear is the caſe with too many of us, who tho they are not

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so dispoil'd by their sins, but that they can keep up their round of vicious plesures, yet are discontented because they think som others have them more exquisite, think their vices are not Gentile enough, unless they be very expensive, and are covetous only that they may be more Luxurious. These are such as St. *James* speaks of, *who ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts*, Jam. 4. 3. and sure to be mutinous on this account is one of the highest pieces of frenzy. Would any man in his wits tell another he will cut his throat, and then expect he should furnish him with a knife for it? And yet to this amount our murmurs against God, for his not giving us those things wherewith we only design to wage war with him. For surely if the discontents of mankind were closely inspected, I doubt a great many would be found of this kind. It concerns the Reader therefore to make the inquisition in his own breast, both in this and all the former particulars, and I doubt not, if he do it with any ingenuity and uprightness, he will be abundantly convinced that for his few mites of obedience he paies to God, he receives talents of mercies (even tempo-

ral) from him: and that on the other side, that God as much underpaies his sins, as he overpaies his services: by which God do's sufficiently atteſt how little he delights in our affliction, how gladly he takes any light occaſion of careſſing and cheriſhing, and overskips thoſe of puniſhing us. Which ſure ought to make us convert all our diſpleſures againſt our ſins, which extort thoſe acts of ſeverity from him, to which his nature is moſt averſe. And here indeed our reſentments cannot be too ſharp, but towards God our fitteſt addreſs will be in the penitential form of the Prophet Daniel, *O Lord, to us belongeth confuſion of face, but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveneſs, tho we have rebelled againſt him*, Dan. 9. 8. 9. And as his juſtice is to be revered in his inflictions, ſo is his wiſdom alſo, in ſo diſpoſing of events to particular perſons, as may beſt conſiſt with the univerſal Oeconomy and managery of the world, the conſideration whereof is the deſign of the next Section.

SECT.

Sect. VI.

Of Gods general Providence.

1. When God made the univerſe, he intended not only to glorify himſelf in one tranſient act of his power, and then leave this great and wonderful production of his, as the *Oſtrich her eggs* in the wilderneſs, Lam. 4. 3. but having drawn it out of its firſt Chaos, he ſecur'd it from returning thither again, by eſtabliſhing as a due ſymmetry of parts, ſo alſo a regular order of motion: hence it is that the heavens have their conſtant revolutions, the earth its ſucceſſion of determinate ſeaſons, animals their alternate courſe of generation and corruption, and by this wiſe Oeconomy, the world after ſo many thouſand years, ſeems ſtill in its ſpring and firſt beauty. But it had bin in vain to have thus ſecured the defection of the creatures, if man for whoſe ſake they were made had bin excluded from this care. His faculty of reaſon would

have made him but the more fatal instrument of confusion, and taught him the more compendious waies of disturbing the world. *Job* compares him *to the wild asses colt*, Job 11. 12. which takes its range without diverting to any thing of the common good. God has therefore doubly hedged in this unruly creature, made a fence of laws about him (both natural and positive) and besides has taken him into the common circle of his providence, so that he, as well as the rest of the creation, has his particular station assign'd him; and that not only in reference to other creatures, but himself; has put a difference between one man and another, ordained several ranks and Classes of men, and endowed them with special and appropriate qualifications for those stations wherein he has set them.

2. THIS, as it is a work of infinit wisdom in God, so it is of unspeakable advantage to men. Without this regular disposure, the world would have bin in the same confusion which we read of in the host of the Midianites, *every mans sword against his fellow*, Jud. 7. 22. Nothing but force could determine who should do, or enjoy any thing; and even that decision

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alſo would have bin repelable by a greater force: ſo that we have all reaſon to confeſs the utility of that order God has ſet among men: and even he that bears the loweſt and moſt deſpicable place in it, is certainly infinitly more happy by contributing to that general Harmony, then he could be in any ſtate of diſcord.

3. When this now well conſider'd, methinks it ſhould ſilence all our complaints, and men ſhould not be ſo vehemently concernd in what part of the ſtructure it pleaſes the great Architect to put them: for every man is to look on himſelf only as a ſmall parcel of thoſe materials which God is to put into form. Every ſtone is not fit for the corner, nor every little rafter for the main beam: the wiſdom of the Maſter builder is alone to determin that. And ſure there cannot be a more vile contemt of the divine wiſdom then to diſpute his choice. Had God wiſdom enough to contrive this vaſt and beautiful fabric, and may he not be truſted with one of us poor worms? Did he by his *wiſdom make the heavens, and by his underſtanding ſtretch out the clouds*, Pro. 3. 19. and ſhall he not know where to place a little lump of figur'd earth? this is certainly

tainly the moſt abſurd diſtruſt imaginable, and yet this is really the true meaning of our repining at the condition he has placed us in.

4. THE truth is, we are ſo full of our ſelves, that we can ſee nothing beyond it: every man expects God ſhould place him where he has a mind to be, tho by it he diſcompoſe the whole ſcheme of his providence. But tho we are ſo ſenſeleſsly partial, yet God is not ſo: he that comprehends at once the whole concern of mankind, applies himſelf to the accomodating thoſe, not the humoring any particular perſon. *He has made the great and the ſmall, and careth for all alike*, Wiſd. 6. 7. He is the common Father of mankind, and diſpoſes things for the public advantage of this great family, and tis not all the impatient cravings of a froward child that ſhall make him recede from his deſigned method. We are apt enough, I am ſure, to tax it not only as a weakneſs, but injuſtice too in a Prince, when he indulges any thing to a private favorite to the public diſadvantage; yet ſo unequal are we, that we murmur at God for not doing that, which we murmur at men for doing.

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5. Besides a man is to consider, that other men have the same appetites with himself. If he dislike an inferior state, why should he not think others do so too? and then as the wise man speaks, *whose voice shall the Lord hear?* Ecclus. 34. 24. Tis sure great insolence in me to expect that God should be more concern'd to humor me, then those multitudes of others who have the same desires. And the more impatient my longings are, the less in reason should be my hopes; for mutiny is no such endearing quality as to render any man a dearling to God. But if all men should have equal satisfactions, we should puzle even Omnipotence it self. Every man would be above, and superior, yet those are comparative terms, and if no man were below, no man could be above. So in wealth, most men desire more, but every man do's at left desire to keep what he has; how then shall one part of the world be supplied without the diminution of the other, unless there should be as miraculous a multiplication of treasure for mans avarice, as there was of Loaves for their hunger, Mat. 16. 9. It was a good answer which the Ambassadors of an oppreſt Province made to *Antony*, if O Em-

Emperor, thou wilt have double taxes from us, thou must help us to double Springs and Harvests. And sure God must be at the expence of a new Creation, make us a double world, if he should oblige himself to satisfy all the unreasonable appetites of men: and if he satisfy not all, why should any particular person look that his alone should be indulged to?

6. Yet as unreasonable as it is, the most of us do betray such a perswasion. No man is discontented that there are lower, as well as higher degrees in the world, that there are poor as well as rich, but all sensible men assent to the fitness of it: yet if themselves happen to be set in the lower form, they exclame as if the whole order of the world were subverted; which is a palpable indication that they think that Providence which governs others should serve them, and distribute to them not what it, but themselves think good. This immoderate self-love is the spring and root of most of our complaints, makes us such unequal judges in our own concerns, and promts us to put in Caveats and exceptions on our own behalf, as *David* did on his sons, *See that thou hurt not the young man Absolom?* 2 Sam. 18. 15.

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as if God were to manage the government of the World with a particular regard to our liking, and were like the Angels at *Sodom*, Gen. 19. 22. to *do nothing till we had got into Zoar*, had all our demands ſecured to us.

7. It would indeed aſtoniſh a conſidering man to ſee, that altho the concerns of men are all diſpoſed by an unerring Wiſdom, and acknowledged by themſelves to be ſo, yet that ſcarce any man is pleaſed. The truth is, we have generally in us the worſer part of the Levelers principle, and tho we can very contentedly behold multitudes below us, yet are impatient to ſee any above us; not only the *foot* (to uſe the Apoſtles ſimile) *complains that it is not the hand, but the ear becauſe it is not the eye*, 1 Cor. 12. 15, 16. Not only the lowermoſt, but the higher ranks of men are uneaſie, if there be any one ſtep above them. Nay ſo importunate is this aſpiring humor, that we ſee men are forced to feed it, tho but with air and ſhadows. He that cannot make any real advance in his quality, will yet do it in Effigies, in all little gaieties and pageantries of it. Every degree in theſe reſpects not only emulates, but imitates

its ſuperior, till at laſt by that impatience of their proper diſtance they make it greater, & ſink even below their firſt ſtate by their ridiculous profuſion. Indeed the World ſeems to be ſo over-run with this vanity, that there is little viſible diſtinction of the degrees, and one had need go to the Herald office to know mens qualities, for neither their habit nor equipage do now adaies inform us with any certainty.

8. But by all this it appears that men look on themſelves only as ſingle perſons, without reference to the community whereof they are members. For did they conſider that, they would endevor rather to become the places wherein they were ſet, by doing the duties belonging to them, then be perpetually projecting for a change. A tree that is every year tranſplanted will never bear fruit, and a mind that is alwaies hurried from its proper ſtation, will ſcarce ever do good in any. This is excellently expreſt to us by *Solomon*, *As a bird that wandereth from his neſt, ſo is a man that wandereth from his place*, Prov. 27.8. 'Tis eaſy to divine the fate of thoſe young ones from whom the dam wanders, and tis as eaſie to gueſs how the duties of that place will be performed,

formed, whoſe owner is alwaies upon the wing, and making towards another. I wiſh we had not too coſtly experiments both in Church and State of the truth of this obſervation. Alas, we forget that we are all ſervants to the ſame Maſter, and that he is to appoint in what office we ſhall ſerve him. How ſhould we like it in any of our own Families, to have an inferior officer leave his work undon, becauſe he has more mind to be Major-domo? Yet this inſolence we every day repete towards God, ſullenly diſpute his orders, and unleſs we may chuſe our own imploiments, will do nothing.

9. 'TIS evident, this perverſe temper of mankind breeds a great deal of miſchief and diſturbance in the World, but would breed arrant confuſion and ſubverſion, if it were ſuffered to have its full range. If God permit but one ambitious ſpirit to break looſe in an Age, as the inſtrument of his wrath, what deſtruction does it often times make? How does it *cauſe the whole earth to tremble, and ſhake Kingdoms*, as is ſaid of *Nebuchadnezzar*, Iſa. 14.16. and may be ſaid of many others of thoſe whole-ſale Robbers who have dignified the trade? But if every aſpiring

ing humor ſhould be as proſperous, where would it find fuel to maintain the flame? No doubt every Age produces men of as unbounded deſires as *Alexander* or *Ceſar*, but God gives them not the ſame opportunities to trouble the world. And accordingly in the more petty ambitions of private men he often orders it ſo, that thoſe ſoaring minds can find no benign gale to help their mounting. He that ſets bounds to the Sea, ſaying, *hitherto ſhalt thou come and no farther, and tho the waves thereof toſs themſelves, yet can they not prevail, tho they roar, yet can they not paſs over*, Jer. 5. 22. does alſo depreſs the ſwelling pride of men, hangs clogs and weights upon them that they cannot riſe to their affected height. For tho we are all willing to forget it, yet God remembers that he is the Rector of the Univerſe, and will aſſert his Dominion. The ſubtileſt contrivance cannot circumvent him, the moſt daring pretender cannot wreſt any thing out of his hand, the *Lord will ſtill be King, be the people never ſo impatient*, Pſalm 99. 1. 'Twill therefore ſure be as well our prudence as our duty, to *be ſtill, and know that he is God*, Pſalm 46. 10. with an humble dereliction of our own wills acquieſce in his,

his, and not by ineffective ſtrūglings provoke, whom we are ſure never to ſubdue. We may, like unmanag'd Horſes, ſome and fret, but ſtill God has the bridle in our jaws, and we cannot advance a ſtep farther then he permits us. Why ſhould we then create torment to our ſelves by our repinings, which only ſets us farther from our aims. 'Tis Gods declared method to exalt the lowly, and 'tis obſervable in the firſt two Kings of *Iſrael*, who were of Gods immediate election, that he ſurprized them with that Dignity, when they were about mean and humble emploiments, the one ſearching his Fathers Aſſes, the other keeping his Fathers ſheep: and would men honeſtly and diligently exerciſe themſelves in the buſineſs of their proper calling, they might perhaps find it a more direct road to advancement, then all the ſiniſter Arts by which ambitious men endeavor to climb. *Solomon* ſets it down as an Aphoriſm, *Seeſt thou a man diligent in his buſineſs, he ſhall ſtand before Kings, he ſhall not ſtand before mean men*, Pro. 22 29. But whether it happen to have that effect or no, it will have a better, for it will ſweeten his preſent condition, divert his mind from mutinous reflections

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on other mens height, and his own low-neſs; for 'tis commonly men who mind not their work that are at ſo much leiſure to gaze. He that carefully plies his own buſineſs, will have his thoughts more concentred: and doubtleſs 'tis no ſmall happineſs to have them ſo, for 'tis their gadding too much abroad, looking on other mens conditions that ſends them back (like *Dinah* deflowred) to put all in uproar at home. The ſon of *Syrach* ſpeaks with tranſportation of the ſtate even of him that labors and is content, and calls it *a ſweet life*, Eccluſ. 40. 18. And certainly 'tis infinitly more ſo then that of the geeateſt Prince whoſe mind ſwells beyond his territories.

10. Upon all theſe conſiderations it cannot but appear very reaſonable that we ſhould leave God to govern the world, not be putting in like the ſons of *Zebedee*, for the higheſt ſeats, but continually reſt our ſelves where he has placed us, till his Providence (not our own deſigns) advance us. We can no where be ſo obſcure as to be hid from his eies, who as he valued the Widows mite above the great oblations of the Rich; ſo he will no leſs graciouſly accept the humble endevors of

of the mean, then the more eminent ſervices of the Mighty; Himſelf having declared, That he accepts, *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*, 2 Cor. 18. 12. So that in what rank ſoever a man is ſet, he has ſtill the opportunity of approving himſelf to God, and tho in the eie of the World he be a veſſel of diſhonor, yet in the day when God comes to *make up his Jewels*, Mal. 5. 17. there will be another eſtimate made of him who regularly moves in his own ſphere. And ſure he that ſits down in this acquieſcence is a happier man, then he that enjoies the greateſt wordly ſplendor: but infinitly more ſo then he who impatiently covets but cannot attain them; for ſuch a man puts himſelf upon a perpetual rack, keeps his appetites up at the utmoſt ſtretch, and yet has nothing wherewith to ſatisfie them. Let therefore our eaſe, if not our duty promt us to acquieſcence, and a ready ſubmiſſion to Gods diſpoſals, to which we have yet a farther inducement from that diſtinct care he hath over every mans peculiar, by which he proportions to him, what is really beſt for him; of which we are farther to conſider in the next Section.

Sect.

Sect. VII.

Of Gods particular Providence.

1. IT is the imperfection of our finite nature, that we cannot at once attend to divers things, but the more vehement our intention is upon one, the greater is our neglect of the reſt. But Gods Infinity cannot be ſo bounded; his Eies at once ſee, and his Providence at once orders all the moſt diſtant and diſparate things in the World. He is not ſuch an Epicurean Deity, as to ſequeſter himſelf wholly to the enjoiment of his own felicity, and to deſpiſe the concerns of poor mortals; but tho he have his *dwelling ſo high, yet he humbleth himſelf to behold the things in heaven and earth*, Pſal. 113.5. Nor does his Providence confine it ſelf to the more ſplendid and greater parts of managery, the conduct of Empires and States, but it deſcends to the loweſt parts of his Creation, to the *Fowls* of the air, to the *Lilies* of the field, and then

then ſure our Saviors inference as to mankind is irrefragable, *Are ye not much better then they?* Mat. 6. 26. If a Sparrow (as he elſewhere tells his Diſciples) cannot fall to the ground without Gods particular notice; ſurely no human creature is leſs conſiderable to him; nay if our very haires are numbred, we cannot think the excreſcence is of more value then the ſtock, but muſt conclude that God with a particular advertence watches over the concerns of every man.

2. Now God being infinitly good, cannot thus attend us upon any inſidious deſign of doing us miſchief: he watches over us as a guardian, not as a ſpy: and directs his obſervation to the more ſeaſonable adapting his benefits. And as he is thus gracious in deſigning our advantage; ſo he is no leſs wiſe in contriving it. All things ſaies the *wiſe man are not profitable for all men*, Eccluſ. 37. 28. Indeed nothing is abſolutly good but God: all created things are good or ill in reference to that to which they are applied. Meat is good, but to a ſurfeited ſtomach tis not only nauſeous but dangerous. Fire is good, but if put in our boſoms, not only burns our cloths but fleſh. And as human

man wiſdom directs the right application of theſe and the like, ſo the ſupreme and divine orders events according to the diſpoſition of the perſon concern'd; *he knows our frame*, Pſal. 103. 14. and diſcerns what operation ſuch or ſuch things will have upon us, while we who know neither our ſelves nor them, can make but random gueſſes, and worſe choices. And ſure he that do's but thus in the general acknowledg Gods providence, goodneſs and wiſdom (which he is no Chriſtian who do's not) has a ſufficient amulet againſt all his ſollicitudes, much more his repinings. He cannot think he ſuffers unawares to him who ſees all things. He cannot think his ſufferings are deſign'd for ill to him, becauſe they are diſpos'd by him who intends and projects his good. Nor can he fear thoſe intentions can miſcarry, which are guided by an infinit and unerring wiſdom, and backt by an uncontrolable power. And ſure this is as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, Heb. 6. 18. *ſtrong conſolation*, if we would but duely apply it.

3. YET becauſe general notions do often make but light impreſſions on us, it may not be amiſs to make a little more inſpection, and to obſerve how appli-

plicable they are to the ſeveral kinds of our diſcontents. Now thoſe may be reduced to two: for either we are troubled at the want of ſomthing we deſire, or at the ſuffering of ſomthing we would avert; ſo that the two notions of privative and poſitive, divide between them all our affliction.

4. THE firſt of theſe is uſually the moſt comprehenſive, for there are few who have not more torment from the apprehenſion of ſomwhat they want, then from the ſmart of any thing they feel. And indeed whilſt our deſires are ſo vagrant and exorbitant, they will be ſure to furniſh matter enough for our diſcontents. But certainly there is not in the world ſuch a charm for them, as the conſideration that God is more wiſe to diſcern, and more careful to provide what is really good for us then we our ſelves. We poor purblind creatures look only on the ſurface of things, and if we ſee a beautiful appearance, ſomwhat that invites our ſenſes, we court it with the utmoſt earneſtneſs; but God penetrates deeper, he ſees to the bottom both of us and thoſe things we deſire, and finds often that tho they may pleaſe our appetite, they will hurt our

health: and will no more give them to us, then a careful father will to his child thoſe gilded poiſons he cries for. Perhaps this man is taken with the enchanting muſic of fame, likes not his own obſcure ſtation, but would fain preſent himſelf upon a more public Theater, come into the eie and croud of the world; but how little do's he know how he ſhall act his part there: whether he ſhall come off with a plaudite or a hiſs? He may render himſelf but the more public ſpectacle of ſcorn; or if he do not that, he may by a better ſucceſs feed up his vain glory to ſuch a bulk, as may render him too great a weight for that tottering pinnacle whereon he ſtands: and ſo after he has made a towring circle, he may fall back with more ignominy to his firſt point. Another it may be no leſs eagerly deſires wealth, thinks (as once *Cræſus* did) that he that abounds in treſure cannot be emty of felicity; but alas how knows he how he ſhall employ it? There are two contrary temtations that attend riches; riots, and covetouſneſs: and he is ſure a little too confident, that dares promiſe himſelf that when there is ſuch odds againſt him, he ſhall certainly chuſe the one juſt mean:

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and if he do not, he do's only inflame his account at the great Audit. Beſide the more wealth he has, the fairer booty he is to the avarice of others; and it has bin often ſeen, that many a man had not died ſo poor, if he had lived leſs rich. Another perhaps thinks not himſelf ſo much to want wealth as children to heir it, and complains *with Abraham, Lord what wilt thou give me ſeeing I go childleſs?* Gen. 15. 2. yet how knows he whether that child he ſo much deſires *ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool,* Eccle. 2. 19. a comfort or a vexation to himſelf if he live to ſee his proof? and if he do not, he do's but project for an acceſs to his dying cares in what hands to leave him. *Rachel* ſollicited this ſatisfaction with the greateſt impatience, *give me children or I die,* Gen. 30. 1. and tis obſervable that the grant of her wiſh proved the loſs of her life.

5. THUS in theſe and innumerable other inſtances we drive on blindfold, and very often impetuouſly purſue that which would ruin us: and were God as ſhort-ſighted as we, into what precipices ſhould we minutely hurry our ſelves? or were he ſo unkind as to conſider our importunity more then our intereſt, we ſhould quick-

quickly ſink under the weight of our own wiſhes; and as *Juvenal* in his tenth Satyr excellently obſerves, periſh by the ſucces and grant of our Praiers. I ſuppose there is no man that ſoberly recollects the events of his life, but can experimentally ſay, he has ſomtimes deſired things which would have bin to his miſchief if he had had them, and that himſelf has after lookt on the denial as a mercy: as on the other ſide when he has proſper'd in his aims, and had what his ſoul luſted after, it has bin but like the quailes to the *Iſraelites*, a conviction and puniſhment, rather then a ſatisfaction. And now ſurely God may complain of us as he did of *Iſrael*, *How long will it be ere you believe me?* Num. 14. 11. After all the atteſtations he has given of his care and Providence over us, after all the experiments we have had of the folly of our own elections, we cannot yet be brought either to diſtruſt our ſelves, or rely upon him. We will ſtill be chuſing, and look on him as no farther concern'd, then as the executioner of our deſigns.

6. THIS is certainly a ſtrange perverſeneſs, and ſuch as no ſenſible man would be guilty of in any other inſtance. In all our

our ſecular affaires we truſt thoſe whom we have cauſe to think underſtand them better then our ſelves, and rely upon men in their own faculty. We put our eſtates in the Lawyers hand, our bodies into the Phyſicians, and ſubmit to their advice tho it be againſt our humor, merely becauſe we account them more competent judges. Yet this deference we cannot be perſwaded to pay to God, but will ſtill be preſcribing to him, and are very angry if his diſpenſations do not exactly anſwer our fancies. And can we offer him a greater affront then thus to diſtruſt him? What is it but interpretatively to deny either his wiſdom, or his goodneſs, or both? and ſo derogate from him in two of his eſſential attributes. For there can be no rational account given by any who believe thoſe, why they ſhould not remit their whole concerns to him. So that the ſhort account is, that in our diſtruſts we either deny him to be God, or our ſelues to be men, by reſiſting the moſt evident dictates of that reaſon which diſtinguiſhes us from brutes. For certainly there is not in human diſcourſe a more irrefragable Maxim, then that we ought for our own ſakes to reſign our ſelves

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to him, who we are infallibly ſure, can, and will chuſe better for us then we for our ſelves.

7. THIS was ſo apparent by mere natural light, that *Socrates* adviſed men to pray only for bleſſings in general, and leave the particular kind of them to Gods election, who beſt knows what is good for us. And ſure this is ſuch a piece of divinity, as extremely reproches us Chriſtians, who cannot match a Heathen in his implicit faith to God. Nay indeed tis the vileſt defamation upon God himſelf, that we who pretend to know him more, ſhould truſt him leſs. So that we ſee our repinings do not terminate in their own proper guilt, but do in their conſequences ſwell higher, and our diſcontents propagate themſelves into Blaſphemy. For while we impatiently complain of our wants, we do tacitly tax God to want either that wiſdom, power, or love, whereby he ſhould ſupply us. And ſure he muſt be very Atheiſtical to whom this will not give a competent prejudice againſt this ſin.

8. AND this very conſideration will equally prejudg the other branch of our diſcontents, I mean thoſe which repine at

at the ills we ſuffer. And not only our privative, but our poſitive afflictions may by it have their bitterneſs taken off: for the ſame goodneſs and wiſdom which denies thoſe things we like, becauſe they are hurtful for us, do's upon the very ſame reaſon give us thoſe diſtaſtful things which he ſees profitable. A wiſe Phyſician do's not only diet, but if occaſion be, purge his Patient alſo. And ſurely there is not ſuch a purifier, ſuch a cleanſer of the ſoul as are afflictions, if we do not (like diſorderly Patients) fruſtrate their efficacy by the irregular managery of our ſelves under them.

Sect. VIII.

Of the advantage of Afflictions.

1. IT were the work of a volume to give an exact and minute account of the benefit of Afflictions. I ſhall only point at ſome of the more general and obvious. And firſt, it is one of the moſt awakening calls to repentance; and to this end it is that God moſt uſually deſigns it. We ſee the whole ſcene of it, Hoſ. 5.15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledg their offence, and ſeek my face: in their affliction they will ſeek me early:* and in the very next verſe we find this voice of God echoed forth by a penitential note, *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us up.* Thus we find the Brethren of *Joſeph*, tho there had a long interval paſſed betwixt their barbarous uſage of him, and his feigned rigor to them, yet when they ſaw themſelves diſtreſt by the one, then they begin to recollect the other,

other, saying, *We are verily guilty concerning our brother*, Gen. 42. 21. Prosperity is an intoxicating thing, and there are few brains strong enough to bear it; it laies us asleep, and amuses us with pleasant dreams, whil'st in the mean time *Satan* rifles our tresures, and spoils us, by the deceitful charms of sin, of our innocency and real happiness. And can there be a more friendly office don for a man in this condition, then to rouz him, and bring him to apprehend the designs that are laid against him? And this is the errand on which afflictions are sent: so that we have reason to look on them as our friends and confederates that intend our rescue, and to take the alarm they give us, and diligently seek out those intestine enemies of which they warn us. And he that instead of this, quarrels at their interposing, thinks them his *enemies because they tell him the truth*, Gal. 4. 16. does miserably pervert *the counsel of God against himself*, Luk. 7. 30. and may at last verify his own jealousies; and by so provoking an ingratitude, convert those into the wounds of an enemy, which were originally meant as the corrections of a Father.

2. And as afflictions do thus in general admoniſh us of ſins, ſo it pleaſes God moſt frequently ſo to model and frame them, that they bear the very image and impreſs of thoſe particular guilts they are to chaſtiſe, and are the dark ſhadows that attend our gay delights, or flagrant inſolencies. The Wiſe Man obſerves, that the turning the Egyptian Waters into Blood, was a manifeſt reproof of that cruel commandment for the murdering of the Hebrew Infants, *Wiſd.* 12. 5. And ſurely we might in moſt, if not all our ſufferings, ſee ſome ſuch correſponding circumſtances, as may lead us to the immediate provoking cauſe of it. God who does all things in number, weight, and meſure, does in puniſhments alſo obſerve a ſymmetry and proportion, and adapts them not only to the heinouſneſs, but even the very ſpecific kind of our crimes. The only fixt immutable rule he has given for his Vice-gerents on earth to puniſh by, is that in the caſe of murder, which is we ſee grounded on this rule of proportion, *He that ſheddeth mans blood, by man ſhall his blood be ſhed*, Gen. 9. 6. And tho he have now reſcinded the inferior retaliations of the *eie for the eie, the tooth*

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for the tooth, Exod. 21. 24. (probably for the hardneſs of our hearts, becauſe he ſaw our revengeful natures would be too much pleaſed with it) yet he has not precluded himſelf from acting by thoſe meſures, but we ſee it do's very often ſignally make men feel the ſmart of thoſe violencies or injuſtice they have uſed to others. Of this the Sacred ſtory affords ſeveral examples (as *Adonibezek*, Jud. 1. 5. and *Ahab*, 1 King. 21. 19.) and profane many more, and daily experience and obſervation moſt of all. And tho this method of retaliation is not alwaies ſo evident and apparent to the World, becauſe mens ſins are not alwaies ſo, yet I believe if men would duely recollect, it would be for the moſt part diſcernable to their own conſciences, and they would apparently ſee, that their Calamities did but trace the footſteps of their ſins.

3. Now if we rightly weigh this, we cannot but think it a very advantageous circumſtance. We are naturally blind when we look inward, and if we have not ſome adventitious light to clear the object, wil be very apt to overlook it. Therefore ſince the end of all our afflictions is our repentance, it is a wiſe and gracious diſpoſal

poſal, that they do thus point to us thoſe particular ſins of which we are to repent. The body of ſin will not be deſtroied in the whole entire bulk, but muſt be diſmembred, pull'd to pieces limb by limb. He that attaques it otherwiſe, will be like *Sertorius*'s ſoldier, who ineffectively tugg'd at the Horſes tail to get it off at once, when he that pull'd it hair by hair quickly did it. Therefore as it is a great part of our ſpiritual Wiſdom to know in what eſpecial parts the *Sampſon* like ſtrength of our corruptions lie, ſo it is a great inſtance of Gods care of us, thus by his corrections to diſcipline and inſtruct us in it.

4. In all our Afflictions therefore it is our concern, nicely and critically to obſerve them. I mean not to enhance our murmurs and complaints, but to learn by them what is Gods peculiar controverſy againſt us. This is indeed *to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it*, Mic. 6. 9. Let him therefore that ſuffers in any of his concerns, examine whether he have not ſome correſponding guilt which anſwers to it, *as face anſwers face*, Prov. 27. 19. He that is impoveriſhed in his eſtate, let him conſider firſt how he acquired it, whether there were not ſomthing of fraud

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or injuſtice, which like a cancrous humor, mixt in its very elements and conſtitution, and eat out its bowels: or whether ſome ſacrilegious prize, ſome coal from the altar have not fired his neſt. Or if nothing can be charged upon the acqueſt, let him conſider how he has uſed it; whether he have not made it the fuel of his luſts, in riot and exceſſes, or the object of his adoration in an inordinate value of it. In like manner he who is afflicted in his body, groans under the torment of ſome grievous diſeaſe, may very ſeaſonably interrogate himſelf, whether it have not bin contracted by his vice, whether *his bones be not* (in a more literal ſenſe then *Job* meant it) *full of the ſins of his youth*, Job 20. 11. and his ſurfeting and drunkenneſs be not the cauſe, *that his ſoul*, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *abhors all manner of meat, and is even hard at deaths door*, Pſalm 107. 18. or at leaſt whether the not employing his health and ſtrength to thoſe purpoſes for which 'twas given, is not the reaſon of its being withdrawn. He alſo that is invaded in his reputation, that lies under ſome great infamy, is to conſider whether it be not deſerved; whether ſome part, if not the whole guilt of which he

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is accuſed, ſtick not to him: or if he be clear in that particular inſtance, whether ſome conceled ſin of his would not if it were known, incur as great ſcandal: for in that caſe he has in right forfeited his reputation, and God may make the ſeizure as well by an unjuſt, as a juſt accuſation. Or if his heart accuſe him not here, yet let him farther reflect, whether his vain-glorious purſuits of praiſe and high conceits of himſelf, have not made this an apt and neceſſary Humiliation for him. Or laſtly, let him recollect how he has behaved himſelf towards others in this kind: whether he have had a juſt tenderneſs of his Neighbors fame, or have not rather expoſed and proſtituted it. In theſe and many other inſtances ſuch a particular ſcrutiny, would (in all probability) diſcover the affinity and cognation between our guilts and our puniſhments, and by marking out the Spring and Fountain-head, direct us how to ſtop or divert the Current. And he that would diligently employ himſelf in this Inquiſition, would find little leiſure, and leſs cauſe to condole his Afflictions, but would divert all his complaints upon himſelf, *accept of the puniſhment of his iniquity,*

ty, and thank the Lord for thus giving him warning, Psal. 16. 8.

5. A second benefit which God designs us in our Afflictions, is the weaning us from the World, to disentangle us from its fetters and charms, and draw us to himself. We read in the story of the *Deluge*, that so long as the Earth was covered with Waters, the very *Raven* was contented to take shelter in the Ark, but when all was fair and dry, even the *Dove* finally forsook it, *Gen.* 8. 12. And 'tis much so with us: the worst of men will commonly in distresses have recourse to God (the very Heathen Mariners in a storm could rebuke *Jonah* for not calling upon his God, *Jon.* 1. 6.) when yet the very best of us, are apt to forget him amidst the blandishments and insinuations of prosperity. The kind aspects of the World are very enchanting, apt to inveigle and besot us; and therefore it is Gods care over us, to let us somtimes see her more averting countenance in her frowns and storms; that, as Children frighted by some ugly appearance, we may run into the arms of our Father. Alas, were all things exactly fitted to our humors here, when should we think of a

remove? and had not Death ſome harbingers to prepare us for him, what a ſurpriſing gueſt would he be to us? 'Tis ſtoried of *Antigonus*, that ſeeing a Soldier in his Camp of ſo daring a courage, that he alwaies courted the moſt hazardous attemts, and obſerving him alſo of a very infirm ſickly habit, he took a particular care of him, and by Medicines and good attendance recovered him; which no ſooner he had don, but the man grew more cautious, and would no longer expoſe himſelf as formerly; and gave this reaſon for it, that now he was healthy his life was of ſome value to him, and not to be hazarded at the ſame rate, as when it was only a burden; and ſhould God cure all our complaints, render us perfectly at eaſe, I fear too many of us would be of the Soldiers mind, think our lives too good to reſign to him, much more to hazard for him, as our Chriſtianity in many caſes obliges us. The ſon of *Syrach* obſerves, how *dreadful death is to a man that is at reſt in his poſſeſſions, that hath abundance of all things, and hath nothing to vex him*; nay he deſcends much lower, and puts in him *who is yet able to receive meat*, Ecclus. 14. 1. The truth is, we do ſo paſſionately

ly dote upon the world, that like beſotted Lovers, we can bear a great deal of ill uſage, before we quit our purſuit. Any little ſlight favor atones us after multiplied affronts, and we muſt be diſciplined by repeted diſappointments, ere we can withdraw our confidence. But how fatally ſecure ſhould we be, if God ſhould permit this Siren alwaies to entertain us with her muſic, and ſhould not by ſome diſcordant grating notes, interrupt our raptures, and recal us to ſober thoughts?

6. INDEED 'tis one of the higheſt inſtances of Gods love, and of his clemency alſo, thus to project our reducement. We were all in our Baptiſm affianced to him, with a particular abrenunciation of the world, ſo that we cannot without the greateſt diſloialty caſt our ſelves into its embraces; and yet when we have thus *broken the covenant of our God*, Prov. 2.17. he does not purſue us with a jealous rage, with the ſeverity which an abuſed rival'd kindneſs would ſuggeſt; doth not give us a bill of divorce and diſclame his relation; but contrives how he may reclame and bring us back to himſelf. The tranſcendency of this lenity God excellently deſcribes by the Prophet in the caſe of *Iſrael*,

They ſay, if a man put away his wife, and ſhe become another mans: ſhall he return unto her again? but thou haſt plaied the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me ſaith the Lord, Jer. 3. 1. And this, tho a great height of Indulgence, is no more then he daily repetes to us. After we have baſely adulterated with the World, converted our affections from God to it, he do's not give us over, abandon us to our leud courſe, and conſequent ruin; but ſtill invites our return: and leſt that may not ſerve, he does with a great deal of Holy artifice, eſſay to break that accurſed League into which we are enter'd, pulls of the diſguiſe in which the world courted us, and makes us ſee it as it is in it ſelf, a ſcene of *vanity and vexation of ſpirit,* Eccles. 1. 14.

6. And as he does this in general, ſo alſo with a particular application to thoſe temporal ſatisfactions wherewith we were moſt tranſported. The things to which we are more indifferent do not ſo much endanger us; 'tis thoſe upon which we have more vehemently ſet our hearts, which become our ſnares, and awake his jealouſy; and accordingly we frequently ſee that 'tis in thoſe he chuſes to croſs us. How of-

often does it happen that those which are enamored of themselves, dote upon their own Features, do meet with some disease or accident which blasts their Beauty, withers that fair Flower, and makes their Winter overtake their Spring? So in our Friends and Relations 'tis usually seen, we soonest lose those for whom we have the greatest, the most immoderate passion. If there be one fondling among our Children, 'tis odds but that is taken away, or made as much the object of our grief and sorrow, as ever it was of our joy and love. When God sees our hearts so excessively cleave to any transitory thing, he knows 'tis necessary to sever them, for whil'st we have such clogs upon us, *our souls will cleave to the dust*, Psalm 119. 1. will not be able to soar up to the higher Region for which they are design'd.

7. IN a word, God so loves us, that he removes whatever he sees will obstruct that intimate union which he desires with us; and sure this is so obliging, that tho he should bid us to our loss, tho he could not recompence us for what he takes from us, yet we must be very ill natur'd if we can be angry at so much kindness. But when

when to this is added, that all this is principally, nay ſolely deſign'd for our advantage, that God takes from us all theſe emty deluſory contentments, merely that he may inſtate us in ſolid and durable joies; we betray as much ignorance of our intereſt, as inſenſibleneſs of our obligation, if we repine that God makes us ſo much his care. 'Tis true indeed, the things to which we have ſo inordinatly adhered, do ſtick ſo cloſe, that they cannot be pull'd away without ſome pain: yet for our corporal ſecurity we can endure the ſundring of parts that do not only cleave, but grow to us. He that has a gangrend member, ſuffers it to be cut off to ſave his whole body, and do's not revile, but thank and reward the Chirurgion. Yet where our ſouls are concern'd, and where the things have no native union with us, but are only cemented by our paſſions, we are impatient of the method, and think God deals very hardly with us, not to let us periſh with what we love. The ſum of all is this, God, tho he be abundantly condeſcending, yet he will never ſtoop ſo low as to ſhare his intereſt in us with the world: if we will devote our ſelves to it, 'tis not all our emty forms of ſervice will ſatisfy him,

him; if we cannot divorce our hearts from it, he will divorce himſelf eternally from us. And the caſe being thus, we are ſure very ill adviſed if we do not contentedly reſign our ſelves to his methods, & cheerfully endure them how ſharp ſoever. The only expedient we have for our own eaſe, is to ſhorten the cure by giving our aſſiſtance, and not by ſtruglings to render it more difficult and painful. Let us entirely ſurrender our wills to him, and when we have don that, we may without much pain let him take any thing elſe. But the more difficult we find it to be diſentangled from the World, the greater ſhould our caution be againſt all future engagements to it. If our eſcape hath bin as the Apoſtle ſaies, *ſo as by fire*, Jude 23. with much ſmart and hazard, let us at leaſt have ſo much wit, as the common Proverb allows children, and not again expoſe our ſelves: let us never glue our hearts to any external thing, but let all the concerns of the World hang looſe about us: by that means we ſhall be able to put them off inſenſibly when ever God calls for them, or perhaps we ſhall prevent his calling for them at all, it being for the moſt part our too cloſe adheſion to them which promts him to it.

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8. A third advantage of afflictions is, that it is a mark and ſignature of our adoption, a witneſs of our legitimation. *What ſon is he* (ſaith the Apoſtle) *whom the Father chaſtiſeth not? but if ye be without chaſtiſement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye baſtards and not ſons*, Heb. 12.7. 8. *Jacob* clad his darling *Joſeph* in a party-coloured Coat, and Gods favorites do here wear a Livery inter-woven with a mixture of dark and gloomy colours; their *long white robes* are laid up for them againſt they come to the *marriage of the Lamb*, Rev. 19.7. Indeed we much miſtake the deſign of Chriſtianity, if we think it calls us to a condition of eaſe and ſecurity. It might ſuit well enough with the Votaries of the Golden Calf, to *ſit down to eat and drink, and riſe up to play*, Exod. 32. 6. but the Diſciples of the crucified Savior are trained to another diſcipline, our profeſſion enters us into a ſtate of warfare, and accordingly our very Baptiſmal engagement runs all in military terms, and we are not only Servants of Chriſts Family, but Soldiers of his Camp. Now we know in a War men muſt not expect to paſs their time in eaſe and ſoftneſs, but beſides all the dangers and difficulties

ficulties of the combat, have many other hardſhips to endure; hunger and thirſt, heat and cold, hard lodgings and weary marches: and he that is too nice for thoſe, will not long ſtick to his colours. And it is the ſame in our ſpiritual warfare: many preſſures and ſufferings are annexed to it, and our paſſive valor is no leſs tried then our active. In reſpect of this it is that our Savior admoniſhes his Proſelytes to compute firſt the difficulties incident to their profeſſion, and that he may not enſnare us by propoſing too eaſy terms, he bids us reckon up the worſt, and tells us, that he *that forſakes not all that he hath, ſhall not be his diſciple,* Luke 14. 26. *and that we muſt thro much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God,* Acts 14. 22. Indeed, 'twere very abſurd for us to expect eaſier conditions, when theſe are the ſame to which our Leader his ſubmitted. The *Captain of our Salvation was perfected by ſufferings,* Heb. 2. 10. *and if it behooved Chriſt to ſuffer before he enter'd into his glory,* Luke 24. 46. it were inſolent madneſs for us to look to be carried thither upon our beds of Ivory, or from the noiſe of our Harps and Viols, be immediatly rapt into the Choir of Angels.

8. This has bin ſo much conſider'd by pious men, that they have lookt upon their ſecular proſperities with fear and jealouſy, and many have ſolemnly petition'd for croſſes, as thinking them the neceſſary atteſtation of their ſon-ſhip, and means of aſſimulation to their elder brother. Why then ſhould that which was ſo deſirable to them, appear ſo formidable to us? or why ſhould we ſo vehemently deprecate, what they ſo earneſtly invited? If we indeed think it a privilege to be the ſons of God, and fellow-heirs with Chriſt, why do we grudg at the condition? The Roman Captain tells St. *Paul*, that he obtained the immunities of a Roman *with a great ſum*, Acts 22. 28. and ſhall we expect ſo much a nobler and more advantageous adoption perfectly *gratis*? look that God ſhould change his whole Oeconomy for our eaſe, give us an Eternal Inheritance, diſcharged of thoſe Temporal Incumbrances himſelf has annexed to it? This were ſure as unjuſt a hope, as it would be a vain one. When *David* had that enſnared propoſal made him, of being the Kings ſon in Law, 1 *Sam.* 18. 21. he ſet ſuch a value upon the dignity, that he deſpiſed the difficulty of the condition: and

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ſure we muſt have very low abject ſouls, if when ſo infinitly a higher advancement is ſincerely offer'd us, we can ſuffer any apprehenſion of hardſhip to divert us. In a word, let us remember that of the Apoſtle, *if we ſuffer, we ſhall alſo reign with him,* 2 Tim. 2. 12. And tho our afflictions be in themſelves not joious but grievous, yet when they are conſider'd as the earneſt of our future inheritance, they put on another face, and may rather enamor then fright us.

9. A fourth advantage of afflictions is, that they excite our compaſſions towards others: there is nothing qualifies us ſo rightly to eſtimate the ſuffering of others, as the having our ſelves felt them: without this our apprehenſions of them are as dull and confuſed, as a blind man's of colours, or a deaf man of ſounds. They *that ſtretch themſelves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midſt of the ſtall: that chaunt to the ſound of the viol, drink wine in bowls, and anoint themſelves with the chief ointments, will not much be grieved with the afflictions of Joſeph,* Amos 6. 4. Nay ſo neceſſary is our experience towards our commiſeration, that we ſee 'twas thought a requiſite

accompliſhment of our High Prieſt (that higheſt example of unbounded compaſſion) and therefore ſaith the Apoſtle, *It behooved him in all things to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high Prieſt in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the ſins of the people, for in that he himſelf hath ſuffer'd being temted, he is able alſo to ſuccor them that are temted,* Heb. 2. 17, 18. But if he whoſe mere ſenſe of our miſeries brought him down to us, choſe this expedient to advance his pity, how neceſſary is it to our petrified bowels? And ſince God has aſſign'd our mercies to our Brethren, as the ſtandard by which he will proportion his to us, 'tis more ours then their advantage to have them enlarged: ſo that when by making us taſt of their cup, acquainting us with the bitter reliſh of their ſufferings, he prepares us to a Chriſtian ſympathy with them, 'tis but a remoter way of obliging and qualifying us for a more ample portion of his mercy. Nay beſides the profit, there is honor accrues to us by it. Compaſſion is one of the beſt properties of our nature, and we unman our ſelves when we put it off; nay more, 'tis an attribute of the Divinity,

vinity, and the more we advance in it, the closer approches we make to him. And therefore we have all reason to bless him for that discipline by which he promotes us in so excellent, so necessary a grace.

10. A fifth benefit of affliction, is, that it is an improvement of Devotion, sets us with more heartiness to our Praiers. Whil'st Prosperity flows in upon us, we bath our selves in its streams, but are very apt to forget its source; so that God is fain to stop the current, leave us dry and parched, that our needs may make us do what our gratitude would not, trace our blessings up to the original spring, and both acknowledg and invoke him as the Author of all our good. This effect of afflictions is observ'd by the Prophet, *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a praier when thy chastning was upon them,* Isa. 26. 16. And I believe I may appeal to every mans experience, whether his Praiers be not more frequent and more hearty too, when he is under some distress. Then how importunate are we in our Petitions? how profuse in our Vows and Promises? saying with *Israel, Deliver us only we pray thee this day: and they put away the strange Gods from among them,*

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and ſerved the Lord, Jud. 10. 15. I confeſs, 'tis no good indication of our temper, that we need thus to be put in the preſs ere we will yield any thing. yet ſince we are ſo diſingenuous, 'tis a mercy in God to adapt his methods to us, to extort when we will not give; and if he can have no free-will-offerings, yet at leaſt to exact his tribute. Nor do's he deſign the effect of this ſhould ceaſe with the calamity that raiſ'd it, but expects our compell'd addreſſes ſhould bring us into the way of voluntary ones, and happily enſnare us into Piety. And indeed herein we are worſe then brutiſh if it do not. We think it a barbarous rudeneſs to engage a man in our affairs, and as ſoon as we have ſerved our own turns, never take farther notice of him. Nay indeed the very beaſts may lecture us in this piece of Morality, many of them paying a ſignal gratitude where they have received benefits: and ſhall we not come up at leaſt to their pitch? ſhall not the endearment of our deliverance bring our deliverer into ſome repute & conſideration with us, and make us deſire to keep up an acquaintance and entercourſe with him? Yet if ingenuity work not with us, let intereſt at leaſt prevail,

vail, and the remembrance how ſoon we may need him again, admoniſh us not to make our ſelves ſtrangers to him. God complains of *Iſrael*, *Wherefore ſay my people, we are Lords? we will come no more at thee*, Jer. 2. 31. A very inſolent folly to renounce that dependance by which alone they ſubſiſted, and no leſs will it be in any of us if we ſtop our recourſe to him becauſe we have had advantage by it. We have no aſſurance that the ſame occaſion ſhall not recur, but with what face can we then reſume that entercourſe which in the interval we deſpiſed? So that if we have but any ordinary Providence we ſhall ſtill ſo celebrate paſt reſcues, as to continue in a capacity of begging more, and then we cannot but alſo confeſs the benefit of thoſe firſt calamities which inſpirited our devotion, and taught us to pray in earneſt, and will be aſhamed that our Thanks ſhould be utter'd in a fainter accent then our Peritions; or our daily Spiritual Concerns ſhould be more coldly ſolicited then our Temporal accidental ones.

11. NOR is it only our devotion that is thus improved by our diſtreſſes, but many other Graces; our Faith, our Hope, our Patience,

Patience, our Chriſtian Sufferance and Fortitude. It is no triumph of Faith to truſt God for thoſe good things which he gives us in hand, this is rather to walk by ſenſe then Faith, but to rely on him in the greateſt deſtitution, *and againſt hope to believe in hope*, this is the Faith of a true child of *Abraham*, and will *be imputed* to us (as it was to him) *for righteouſneſs*, Rom. 4. 23. So alſo our Patience ows all its opportunities of exerciſe to our Afflictions, and conſequently owes alſo a great part of its being to them, for we know deſuetude will loſe habits. What imaginable uſe is there of Patience, where there is nothing to ſuffer? In our proſperous ſtate, we may indeed imploy our Temperance, our Humility, our Caution; but Patience ſeems then a uſeleſs Vertue: nay indeed, for ought we know, may be counterfeit, till adverſity bring it to the teſt. And yet this is the moſt glorious accompliſhment of a Chriſtian, that which moſt eminently conforms him to the Image of his Savior, whoſe whole life was a perpetual exerciſe of this grace; and therefore we love our eaſe too well if we are unwilling to buy this Pearl at any price.

12. Last-

12. Lastly, Our thankfulneſs is (at leaſt ought to be) increaſt by our diſtreſſes. 'Tis very natural for us to reflect with value and eſteem upon thoſe Bleſſings we have loſt, and we too often do it to aggravate our diſcontent: but ſure, the more rational uſe of it is to raiſe our thankfulneſs for the time wherein we enjoied them. Nay not only our former enjoiments, but even our preſent deprivations deſerve our gratitude, if we conſider the happy advantages we may reap from them. If we will perverſly caſt them away, that unworthy contemt paies no ſcores, for we ſtill ſtand anſwerable in Gods account for the good he deſign'd, and we might have had by it, and we become liable to a new charge for our ingratitude in thus *deſpiſing the chaſtiſement of the Lord*, Heb. 12. 5.

13. And now if all theſe benefits of afflictions (which are yet but imperfectly recited) may be thought worth conſidering, it cannot but reconcile us to the ſharpeſt of Gods methods; unleſs we will own our ſelves ſuch mere Animals, as to have no other apprehenſions then what our bodily ſenſes convey to us. For ſure, he that has reaſon enough to under-

ſtand that he has an immortal ſoul, cannot but aſſent that its intereſts ſhould be ſerved, tho with the diſplacency of his fleſh. Yet even in regard of that, our murmurings are oft very unjuſt, for we do many times ignorantly prejudg Gods deſigns towards us even in Temporals, who frequently makes a little tranſient uneaſineſs the paſſage to ſecular felicities. *Moſes* when he fled out of *Egypt*, probably little thought that he ſhould return thither a *God unto Pharaoh*, Exod. 4. 16. and as little did *Joſeph* when he was brought thither a ſlave, that he was to be a Ruler there: yet as diſtant as thoſe ſtates were, the Divine Providence had ſo connected them, that the one depends upon the other. And certainly we may often obſerve the like over-ruling hand in our own diſtreſſes, that thoſe events which we have entertained with the greateſt regret, have in the conſequences bin very beneficial to us.

14. To conclude, we have certainly both from ſpeculation and experience, abundant matter to calm all our diſquiets, to ſatisfy our diſtruſts, and to fix in us an entire reſignation to Gods diſpoſals, who has deſigns which we cannot penetrate, but none which we need fear, unleſs we

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our ſelves pervert them. We have our Saviors word for it, that *he will not give us a ſtone when we ask bread, nor a ſcorpion when we ask a fiſh*, Matth. 7. 9. Nay his love ſecures us yet farther from the errors of our own wild choice, and do's not give us thoſe ſtones and ſcorpions which we importune for. Let us then leave our concerns to him who beſt knows them, and make it our ſole care to entertain his diſpenſations with as much ſubmiſſion and duty, as he diſpences them with love and wiſdom. And if we can but do ſo, we may dare all the power of Earth and Hell too, to make us miſerable: for be our afflictions what they can, we are ſure they are but what we in ſome reſpect or other need; be they privative or poſitive, the want of what we wiſh, or the ſuffering of what we wiſh not, they are the diſpoſals of him who cannot err, and we ſhall finally have cauſe to ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is good for me that I have bin afflicted*, Pſalm 119. 71.

SECT.

Sect. IX.

Of our Misfortunes compared with other mens.

WE come now to impreſs an equally juſt and uſeful conſideration, the comparing our Misfortunes with thoſe of other mens: and he that does that, will certainly ſee ſo little cauſe to think himſelf ſingular, that he will not find himſelf ſuperlative in calamity; for there is no man living that can with reaſon affirm himſelf to be the very unhappieſt man, there being innumerable diſtreſſes of others which he knows not of, and conſequently cannot bring them in balance with his own. A multitude of men there are whoſe perſons he knows not, and even of thoſe he does, he may be much a ſtranger to their diſtreſſes; many ſorrows may lie at the heart of him who carries a ſmiling face, and many a man has bin an object of envy to thoſe who look but on the ſurface of his ſtate, who yet to thoſe who know his private griefs appears more worthy of compaſſion. And ſure this confuſed uncer-

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tain eſtimate of other mens afflictions, may divert us from all loud out-cries of our own. *Solon* ſeeing a friend much oppreſt with grief, carried him up to a Town that over-lookt the City of *Athens*, and ſhewing him all the Buildings, ſaid to him, Conſider how many ſorrows have, do, and ſhall in future Ages inhabit under all thoſe roofs, and do not vex thy ſelf with thoſe inconveniencies which are common to mortality, as if they were only yours. And ſure 'twas good advice: for ſuffering is almoſt as inſeparable an adjunct of our nature, as dying is: yet we do not ſee men very apt to imbitter their whole lives by the fore-ſight that they muſt die, but ſeeing it a thing as univerſal as inevitable, they are more forward to take up the Epicures reſolution, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*, 1 Cor. 15. 32: And why ſhould we not look upon afflictions alſo as the common lot of humanity, and as we take the advantages, ſo be content to bear the incumbrances of that ſtate?

2. But beſides that implicite allowance that is thus to be made for the unknown calamities of others, if we ſurvey but thoſe that lie open and viſible to us, the moſt of us ſhall find enough to diſcoun-

countenance our complaints. Who is there that when he has moſt ſtudiouſly recollected his miſeries, may not find ſome or other that apparently equals, if not exceeds him? He that ſtomacs his own being contemn'd and ſlighted, may ſee another perſecuted and oppreſt. He that groans under ſome ſharp pain, may ſee another afflicted with ſharper: and even he that has the moſt acute torments in his body, may ſee another more ſadly cruciated by the agonies of his mind. So that if we would but look about us, we ſhould ſee ſo many foreign occaſions of our pity, that we ſhould be aſham'd to confine it wholly to our ſelves.

3. It will perhaps be ſaid, that this cannot be univerſally true, for that there muſt in comparative degrees be ſome loweſt ſtate of miſery: I grant it, but ſtill that ſtate conſiſts not in ſuch an indiviſible point, that any one perſon can have the incloſure; or if it do, 'twill be ſo hard for any to diſcern who that one perſon is, that I need deſire no fairer a compoſition, then to have every man ſuſpend his repinings, till he can evince his title. But alas, there are but few that can make any approches to ſuch a pretence: for tho if we advert

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to mens complaints, we ſhould think all degrees of compariſon were confounded, and every man were equally the greateſt ſufferer; yet certainly in the truth of things 'tis nothing ſo: for (not to repete what was before mention'd, that probably no man is miſerable in any proportion to the utmoſt degree of poſſibility) the remarkably unhappy are very far the leſs number. And how paſſionatly ſoever men exaggerate their Calamities, yet perhaps in their ſober mood, they will ſcarce change ſtates with thoſe whom they profeſs to think more happy then themſelves. It was the ſaying of *Socrates*, that if there were a common bank made of all mens troubles, moſt men would rather chuſe to take thoſe they brought, then to venture upon a new dividend And indeed he had reaſon for his ſuppoſition; for conſidering how great a part of many mens afflictions are of their own making, fictitious and imaginary, they may juſtly fear leaſt they ſhould exchange feathers for lead, their own emty ſhadows for the real and preſſing calamities of others, and cannot but think it beſt to ſit down with their own, which ſerves their declamations as well, and their eaſe much better. We oft

oft ſee men at a little miſ-ſhaping of a garment, a ſcarce diſcernable error in their Cook, or their ſhorteſt interruption in their ſports, in ſuch tranſports of trouble, as if they were the moſt unfortunate men in the World; yet for all that you ſhall hardly perſwade them to change with him whoſe courſe clothings ſuperſedes all care of the faſhion, whoſe appetite was never diſappointed for want of ſawce, and whoſe perpetual toil makes him inſenſible what the defeat of ſport ſignifies.

4. NAY even where the exchange ſeems more equal, where the afflictions are on both ſides ſolid and ſubſtantial, yet a prudent man would ſcarce venture upon the barter. 'Tis no ſmall advantage to know what we have to conteſt with, to have experimented the worſt of its attaques, by which we become better able to guard our ſelves: but a new evil comes with the force of a ſurpriſe, and finds us open and diſarmed. It is indeed almoſt a miraculous power that cuſtom has in reconciling us to things otherwiſe diſpleaſing; all our ſenſes are taught to remit of their averſion by familiarity with ungrateful objects: that ugly form which at firſt makes us ſtart, by uſe deveſts its ter-

terror, and we reconcile our ſelves to harſh ſounds & ill reliſhes by long cuſtom. And ſure it has the very ſame effect upon our minds, the moſt fierce calamities do by acquaintance grow more tractable; ſo that he that exchanges an old one for a new, do's but bring a wild Lion into his houſe inſtead of a tame: it may for ought he knows immediatly tear him in pieces, but at leaſt muſt coſt him a great deal of pains to render it gentle and familiar, and certainly no wiſe man would wiſh to make ſuch a bargain.

5. BY all this it appears that how extravagantly ſoever we aggravate our own calamities and extenuate other mens, we dare not upon recollection ſtand to our own eſtimate, and what can be ſaid more in prejudice of our diſcontents? Tis a granted maxim that every man muſt have afflictions, *man that is born of a woman, ſaies Job, is of few years, and full of trouble,* Job 13. 4. and we muſt reverſe Gods fundamental law, before we can hope for a total exemtion. All that any man can aſpire to, is to have but an equal ſhare with others, and the generality of men have ſo, at leaſt none can prove he has not ſo; and till he can, his murmurs will ſure be

very unjuſtifiable, eſpecially when they have this convincing circumſtance againſt them, that he dares not upon ſober thoughts change his afflictions with moſt of his neighbors. He is an ill member of a community, who in public aſſeſments would ſhuffle off all paiments: and he is no better, who in this common tax God has laid upon our nature, is not content to bear his ſhare.

6. And truly would we but conſider that in all our ſufferings nothing befals us but what is common to our kind, nay which is extremely exceeded by many within the verge of our own obſervation, we muſt be ſenſeleſſily partial to be impatient. The Apoſtle thought it a competent conſolation for the firſt Chriſtians, that *there had no temtation befallen them but what was common to men*, 1 Cor. 10. 13. and we betray very extravagant opinions of our ſelves if it be not ſo to us. Indeed twas ſcarce poſſible for us to be ſo unſatisfied, as the greateſt part of us are, did we in the comparing our ſelves with others, proceed with any tolerable ingenuity.

7. But alas we are very fallacious and deceitful in the point, we do not compare

pare the good of others with our good, nor their evil with our evil; but with an envious curiosity we amass together all the desireable circumstances of our neighbors condition; and with as prying discontent we ransack all our grievances, and confront to them. This is so insincere a way of proceeding, as the most ordinary understanding can detect. If I should wager that my arm were longer then another mans, and for tryal measure my arm with his finger, he must be stupidly silly, that should award for me; and yet this were not a grosser cheat, then that which we put upon our selves, in our comparisons with others. And tis a little strange to observe unto what various purposes we can apply this one thin piece of Sophistry, for when we compare our neighbors and our selves in point of morality, we do but reverse the fallacy, and presently make his vices as much exceed ours, as our calamities did his in the other instance. They are indeed both great violences to reason and justice, yet the later is sure the pleasanter kind of deceit. A man has some joy in thinking himself less wicked then his neighbor, but what imaginable comfort can he take in think-

ing himſelf more miſerable? certainly he that would ſubmit to a couſenage, had much better ſhift the ſcene, and think his ſufferings leſs then they are, rather then more; for ſince opinion is the thing that uſually ſets an edg upon our calamities, it might be a profitable deceit that could ſteal that from us.

8. But we need not blindfold our ſelves if we would but uſe our eies aright, and ſee things in their true ſhapes; and if we did thus, what a ſtrange turn would there be in the common eſtimates of the world? How many of the gilded troubles of greatneſs, which men at a diſtance look on with ſo much admiration and deſire, would then be as much contemned as now they are courted? A competency would then get the better of abundance, and the now envied pomp of princes, when balanced with the cares and hazards annext, would be ſo far from a bait, that men like *Saul*, 1 Sam. 10. 22. would *hide themſelves* from the preferment; and he that underſtood the weight, would rather chooſe to weild a Flayle then a Scepter: yet ſo childiſhly are we beſotted with the glittering appearance of things, that we conclude felicity muſt needs dwell where there

there is a magnificent Portico, and being poſſeſt with this fancy we over-look her in our own humbler Cottages, where ſhe would more conſtantly reſide, if ſhe could but find us at home: but we are commonly engag'd in a rambling purſuit of her where ſhe is ſeldomeſt to be found, and in the interim miſs of her at her own doors.

9. Indeed there is ſcarce a greater folly or unhappineſs incident to mans nature, then this fond admiration of other mens enjoiments, and contemt of our own. And whilſt we have that humour, it will ſupplant not only our preſent, but all poſſibilities of our future content: for tho we could draw to our ſelves all thoſe things for which we envy others, we ſhould have no ſooner made them our own, then they will grow deſpicable and nauſeous to us. This is a ſpeculation which has bin atteſted by innumerable experiments, there being nothing more frequent, then to ſee men with impatient eagerneſs, nay often with extreme hazards purſue thoſe acqueſts, which when they have them, they are immediatly ſick of. There is ſcarce any man that may not give himſelf inſtances of this in his own particular: and yet ſo fatally ſtupid are we, that no de-

feats will diſcipline us, or take us off from theſe falſe eſtimates of other mens happineſſes. And truly while we ſtate our compariſons ſo unequally, they are as miſchievous as the common proverb ſpeaks them odious: but if we would begin at the right end, and look with as much compaſſion on the adverſities of our brethren, as we do with envy on their proſperities, every man would find cauſe to ſit down contentedly with his own burden, and confeſs that he bears but the proportionable ſhare of his common nature, unleſs perhaps it be where ſome extraordinary demerits of his own have added to the weight; and in that caſe he has more reaſon to admire his afflictions are ſo few, then ſo many. And certainly every man knows ſo many more ills by himſelf, then it is poſſible for him to do by another, that he that really ſees himſelf exceed others in his ſufferings, will find cauſe enough to think he do's in ſins alſo.

10. But if we ſtretch the compariſon beyond our contemporaries, and look back to the generations of old, we ſhall have yet farther cauſe to acknowledg Gods great indulgence to us. *Abraham* tho the friend of God was not exemted from ſevere

vere trials; he was firſt made to wander from his Country, and betake himſelf to a kind of vagrant life, was a long time ſuſpended from the bleſſing of his deſired off-ſpring, and when at laſt his beloved *Iſaac* was obtained, it cauſed a domeſtic jarr, which he was fain to compoſe by the expulſion of *Ishmael*, tho his ſon alſo. But what a conteſt may we think there was in his own bowels, when that rigorous task was impoſed on him of ſacrificing his *Iſaac?* and tho his faith glorioufly triumpht over it, yet ſure there could not be a greater preſſure upon human nature. *David* the man after Gods own heart is no leſs ſignal for his afflictions then for his piety, he was for a great while an exile from his Country, and (which he moſt bewailed) from the Sanctuary by the perſecutions of *Saul*: and after he was ſetled in that throne to which Gods immediate aſſignation had intitled him, what a ſucceſſion of calamities had he in his own family? the inceſtuous rape of his Daughter, the retaliation of that by the as unnatural murder of *Ammon*, and that ſeconded by another no leſs barbarous conſpiracy of *Abſolom* againſt himſelf, his expulſion from *Jeruſalem*, the baſe revilings of *Shimei*, and

and finally the loſs of that dearling ſon in the act of his ſin. A cluſter of afflictions in compariſon whereof the moſt of ours are but like the *gleanings* (as the Prophet ſpeaks) *after the vintage is don.* It were indeed endleſs to inſtance in all the ſeveral Fore-fathers of our Faith before *Chriſts* Incarnation, the Apoſtle gives us a brief, but very comprehenſive compendium of their ſufferings, *They had trial of cruel mockings and ſcourgings; yea moreover, of bonds and impriſonments: they were ſtoned, were ſawn aſunder, were temted, were ſlain with the ſword: they wandred about in ſheep-skins, and goat-skins, being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented: they wandred in deſerts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth,* Heb. 11. 36, 37, 38. And if we look on the Primitive Chriſtians, we ſhall ſee them perfectly the counterpart to them, their privileges conſiſted not in any immunities from calamities; for their whole lives were ſcenes of ſufferings. St. *Paul* gives us an account of his own, *in labors more abundant, in ſtripes above meſure. in priſons more frequent, in deaths oft: of the Jews five times received I forty ſtripes ſave one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I*

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ſtoned, thrice I ſuffer'd ſhipwrack, a night an a day have I bin in the deep, in journying often, &c. 2 Cor. 11. 23. and if his ſingle hardſhips roſe thus high, what may we think the whole ſum of all his fellow-laborers amounted to together, with that noble Army of martyrs who ſealed their faith with their blood; of whoſe ſufferings *Eccleſiaſtic* hiſtory gives us ſuch aſtoniſhing relations.

11. AND now *being compaſſed about with ſo great a cloud of witneſſes,* the Apoſtles inference is very irrefragable, *let us run with patience the race which is ſet before us,* Heb. 12. 1, 2. But yet it is more ſo, if we proceed on to that conſideration he adjoins, *Looking unto Jeſus the Author and finiſher of our faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endur'd the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame,* verſe 3. Indeed if we contemplate him in the whole courſe of his life, we ſhall find him rightly ſtiled by the Prophet *a man of ſorrows,* Iſai. 53. And as if he had charged himſelf with all our griefs as well as our ſins, there is ſcarce any human calamity which we may not find exemplified in him. Do's any complain of the lowneſs and poverty of his condition? Alas his whole life was a

ſtate of indigence: he was forced to be an inmate with the beaſts, he laid in a ſtable at his birth, and after himſelf profeſſes that he *had not where to lay his head*, Luk. 9. 58. Is any oppreſt with infamy and reproach? he may ſee his Savior accus'd as a *glutton and a wine-bibber*, Luke 7. 34. *a Blaſphemer*, Joh. 10. 33. *a Sorcerer*, Mat. 12. 24. *a perverter of the nation*, Luk. 23. 2. yea to ſuch a ſordid lowneſs had they ſunk his repute, that a ſeditious thief and murderer was thought the more eligible perſon, *not this man but Barabbas*, Joh. 18. 40. And finally all this ſcene of indignities clos'd with the ſpightful pageantry of *mockery* acted by the ſoldiers, Mat. 27. 28. and the yet more barbarous inſultings of Prieſts and Scribes, verſe 41. Is any man deſpiſed or deſerted by his friends? he was contemned by his country-men, thought frantic by his friends, betraied by one of his diſciples, abondon'd by all, unleſs that one who followed him longeſt, to renounce him the moſt ſhamefully by a three-fold abjuration. Nay what is infinitly more then this, he ſeem'd deſerted by God alſo, as is witneſſed by that doleful exclamation, *My God, my God, why haſt thou forſaken me?* Mat. 27. 64. Is any

ny diſſatisfied with his hard-ſhips or laborioufneſs of his life? let him remember his Saviors was not a life of delicacy or eaſe: he was never enter'd in thoſe Academies of luxury, where men are *gorgeouſly apparel'd and live delicatly*, Luk. 7. 25. but he was brought under the mean roof of a Carpenter, and conſequently ſubjected to all the lowneſs of ſuch an education. His initiation to his Prophetic office was with the miraculous ſeverity of a 40. daies faſt, and in his diſcharge of it, we find him in perpetual labors, *going about dooing good*, Act. 10. 38. and that not in triumph, like a prince beſtowing his largeſſes, but in weary peregrinations, never riding but once, and that only upon a borrow'd beaſt, *and to fulfil a prophecy*, Mat. 24. Do's any man groan under ſharp and acute pains? let him conſider what his redeemer endured, how in his infancy at his circumciſion he offer'd the firſt fruits, as an earneſt of that bloody vintage when *he trod the wine preſs alone* Iſaiah 63. 3. Let him attend him thro all the ſtages of his direful paſſion, and behold his arms pinion'd wth rough cords, his head ſmote with a reed, and torn with his crown of thorns, his back ploughed

with thoſe *long furrows* (Pſal. 120. 3.) the ſcourges had made; his macerated feeble body oppreſt with the weight of his croſs, and at laſt rackt and extended on it; his hands and feet, thoſe nervous & conſequently moſt ſenſible parts tranſfixt with nailes, his whole body faſtned to that accurſed tree, and expoſed naked to the air in a cold ſeaſon; his throat parched with thirſt, and yet more afflicted with that vinegar and gall wherewith they pretended to relieve him; and finally his life expiring amidſt the full ſenſe of theſe accurate torments. Laſtly do's any man labor under the bittereſt of all ſorrows, importunate temtations to, or a wounded ſpirit for ſin? even here alſo he may find that he has an *high Prieſt who hath bin touched with the ſenſe of his infirmities*, Heb. 4. 15. He was violently aſſaulted with a ſucceſſion of temtations, Mat. 4. and we cannot doubt but Satan would on him employ the utmoſt of his skill. Nor was he leſs oppreſt with the burden of ſin, ours I mean, tho not his own. What may we think were his apprehenſions in the Garden, when he ſo earneſtly deprecated that which was his whole errand into the world? What a dreadful

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preſſure was that which wrung from him that bloody ſweat, and caſt him into that inexplicable agony, the horror whereof was beyond the comprehenſions of any but his who felt it? And finally how amazing was the ſenſe of divine wrath, which extorted that ſtupendous complaint, that *ſtrong cry* on the croſs, Heb. 5. 7. the ſharp accent whereof, if it do aright ſound on our hearts, muſt certainly quite overwhelm our loudeſt groans? And now certainly I may ſay with Pilate, *Ecce homo*, behold the man, or rather with a more divine Author, Behold *if ever there were ſorrows like unto his ſorrows*, Lam. 1. 12.

12. And ſure it were but a reaſonable inference, that which we find made by Chriſt himſelf, *if theſe things be don in a green tree, what ſhall be don in the dry?* Luk. 23. 31. If an imputative guilt could nuriſh ſo ſcorching a flame, pull down ſo ſevere a wrath, what can we expect who are merely made up of combuſtible matter, whoſe proper perſonal ſins cry for vengeance? Sure were we to judg by human meſures, we ſhould reckon to have more then a double portion of our Saviors ſufferings entail'd upon us: yet ſuch is the efficacy of his, that they have commuted for

for ours, & have left us only ſuch a ſhare, as may evidence our relation to our crucified Lord: ſuch as may ſerve only for badges and cognizances to whom we retain. For alas, let the moſt afflicted of us weigh our ſorrows with his, how abſurdly unequal will the compariſon appear? And therefore as the beſt expedient to baffle our mutinies, to ſhame us out of our repinings, let us often draw this uneven parallel, confront our petty uneaſineſſes with his unſpeakable torments; and ſure tis impoſſible but our admiration and gratitude muſt ſupplant our impatiencies.

13. THIS is indeed the method to which the Apoſtle directs us, *Conſider him that endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye be weary and faint in your minds: ye have not yet reſiſted unto blood*, Heb. 12. 34. Was he contradicted, and ſhall we expect to be humor'd and compli'd with? Did he reſiſt to blood & ſhall we think thoſe preſſures intolerable, which force only a few tears from us? This is ſuch an unmanly niceneſs, as utterly makes us unfit to follow the Captain of our Salvation. What a ſoldier is he like to make, that will take no ſhare of the hazards and hardſhips of His General? Honeſt *Uriah* would

would not take the lawful ſolaces of his own houſe, upon the conſideration that his *Lord Joab* (tho but his fellow ſubject) *lay incamped in the open fields*, 2 Sam. 11. 11. yea tho he was ſent by him from the Camp. And ſhall we baſely forſake ours in purſuit of our eaſe? He is of a degenerous ſpirit, whom the example of his ſuperior will not animate. *Plutarch* tells us, that *Cato* marching thro the deſarts, was ſo diſtreſt for water, that a ſmall quantity was brought to him in a helmet as a great prize, which he refuſing becauſe he could not help his ſoldiers to the like, they were ſo tranſported with that generoſity, that it extinguiſht the ſenſe of their thirſt, and they were aſhamed to complain of what their Leader voluntarily endur'd for their ſakes. And ſurely we extremely diſcredit our inſtitution, if we cannot equal their ingenuity, and follow ours with as great alacrity thro all the difficulties he has traced before us, and for us.

14. NOR let us think to excuſe our ſelves upon the impotency of our fleſh, which wants the aſſiſtance which his divinity gave him: for that plea is ſuperſeded by the fore-mention'd examples of the Saints, men of like paſſions with us, who

who not only patiently, but joifully endur'd all tribulations; by which it appears it is not impoſſible to our nature, with thoſe aids of grace which are common to us with them: for certainly the difference between them and us, is not ſo much in the degrees of the aids, as in the diligence of employing them. Let us therefore, as the Apoſtle adviſes, *lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees*, Heb. 12. 12. and with a noble emulation follow thoſe heroic patterns they have ſet us. And ſince we ſee that even thoſe Favorites of heaven, have ſmarted ſo ſeverely, let us never dream of an immunity; but when ever we find our ſelves inclining to any ſuch flattering hope, let every one of us upbraid our ſelves in thoſe terms the *Jews* did our Savior, *Art thou greater then Abraham, and the Prophets, whom makeſt thou thy ſelf?* Joh. 8. 52. Nay we may deſcend lower and take in not only all the inferior Saints of former times, but all thoſe our contemporaries in ſufferings, which are moſt within our view, and may ask the Apoſtles queſtion, *what then? are we better then they?* Rom. 3. 9. If we think we are, tis certain we are ſo much worſe by that inſolence; and if we confeſs we are not, upon

on what ſcore can we pretend to be better treated? To conclude, let us not pore only upon our peculiar evils, but attentively look about us, and conſider what others endure: and ſince in frolics we can ſport our ſelves with many uneaſineſſes for company ſake, let us not be more puſillanimous in our ſoberer moods, but every man cheerfully take his turn in bearing the common burden of mortality, till we put off both it and its appendages together, when this mortal ſhall put on immortality, 1 Cor. 15. 54.

Sect. X.

Of particular Aids for the gaining of Contentment.

1. WE have now paſt thro all thoſe conſiderations we at firſt propoſed, and may truſt the conſidering Reader to make his own collections: yet becauſe impatience is the vice that has bin all this while arraigned, I am to fore-ſee if poſſible, that thoſe who have the greateſt degree of that, may be the leaſt willing to attend the whole proceſs; and therefore I think it may not be amiſs, for their eaſe to ſuit and reduce all into ſome ſhort directions and rules for the acquiring contentment.

2. The firſt and moſt fundamental is, the mortifying our pride, which as it is the ſeminary of moſt ſins, ſo eſpecially this of repining. Men that are highly opinion'd of themſelves are commonly unſatisfiable: for how well ſoever they are treated, they ſtill think it ſhort of their merits. Princes have often experimented this

this in thoſe who have don them ſignal ſervices; but God finds it in thoſe who have don him none, and we expect he ſhall diſpenſe to us according to thoſe falſe eſtimates we put upon our ſelves. Therefore he that aſpires to Content, muſt firſt take truer meſures of himſelf, and conſider that as he was nothing till God gave him a being, ſo all that he can produce from that being, is Gods by original right, and therefore can pretend to nothing of reward; ſo that whatever he recieves, is ſtill upon the account of a new bounty; and to complain that he has no more, is like the murmurs of an unthankful debtor, who would ſtill encreaſe thoſe ſcores which he knows he can never pay.

3. IN the ſecond place, let every man conſider how many bleſſings (notwithſtanding his no claim to any) he daily enjoies: and whether thoſe he ſo impatiently raves after be not much inferior to them. Nay let him ask his own heart, whether he would quit all thoſe he has, for them he wants; and if he would not (as I ſuppoſe no man in his wits would, thoſe wits being part of the barter) let him then judg how unreaſonable his repinings are, when himſelf confeſſes he has the better part of

worldly happineſs, and never any man living had all.

4. In the third place therefore let him ſecure his duty of thankfulneſs for thoſe good things he hath, and that will inſenſibly undermine his impatiencies for the reſt, it being impoſſible to be at once thankful and murmuring. To this purpoſe it were very well, if he would keep a ſolemn catalogue of all the bounties, protections, and deliverances he has receiv'd from Gods hand, and every night examin what acceſſions that day has brought to the ſum: and he that did this, would undoubtedly find ſo many incitations to gratitude, that all thoſe to diſcontent would be ſtifled in the croud. And ſince acknowledgment of Gods mercies is all the tribute he exacts for them, we muſt certainly look on that as an indiſpenſable duty: and therefore he that finds that God ſhortens his hand, ſtops the efflux of his bounty towards him, ſhould reflect on himſelf, whether he be not behind in that homage by which he holds, and have not by his unthankfulneſs *turn'd away good things from him*, Eſa. 59. 8. And if he find it ſo (as who alas is there that may not?) he cannot ſure for

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ſhame complain, but muſt in prudence reinforce his gratitude for what is left, as the beſt means to recover what he has loſt.

5. BUT his murmurs will yet be more amazingly ſilenc'd, if in the fourth place he compares the good things he enjoies with the ill he has don. Certainly this is a moſt infallible cure for our impatiencies, the holieſt man living being able to accuſe himſelf of ſuch ſins, as would according to all human meſures of equity forſeit all bleſſings, & pull down a greater weight of judgment then the moſt miſerable groan under. Therefore as before I adviſed to keep a catologue of benefits receiv'd, ſo here it would be of uſe to draw up one of ſins committed. And doubtleſs he that confronts the one with the other, cannot but be aſtoniſhed to find them both ſo numerous, equally wondring at Gods mercy in continuing his bleſſings, in deſpight of all his provocations, and at his own baſeneſs in continuing his provocations, in deſpight of all tho e bleſſings. Indeed tis nothing but our affected ignorance of our own demerits, that makes it poſſible for us to repine under the ſevereſt of Gods diſpenſations. Would we

we but ranſack our hearts, and ſee all the abominations that lie there, nay would the moſt of us but recollect thoſe bare-fac'd crimes wch even the world can witneſs againſt us, we ſhould find more then enough to balance the heavieſt of our preſſures. When therefore by our impatient ſtruglings we fret and gall our ſelves under our burdens, let us interrogate our ſouls in the words of the Prophet, *Why doth a living man complain, a man for the puniſhment of his ſin?* Let us not ſpend our breath in murmurs and out-cries, which will only ſerve to provoke more ſtripes: but *let us ſearch and try our waies, and* turn *again to the Lord*, Lam. 3. 39. diligently ſeek out *that accurſed thing* which has cauſed our diſcomfeiture, Joſ. 18. and by the removal of that, prepare the way for the acceſs of mercy. But alas how prepoſterous a method do we take in our afflictions? We accuſe every thing but what we ought, furiouſly fly at all the ſecond cauſes of our calamity, nay too often at the firſt by impious diſputes of providence, and in the mean time, as *Job* ſpeaks, *the root of the matter is found in us*, Job. 19. 28. We ſhelter and protect in our boſoms the real Author of our miſe-

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ries. The true way then to allay the ſenſe of our ſufferings, is to ſharpen that of our ſins. The prodigal thought the meaneſt condition in his fathers family a preferment, *Make me one of thy hired ſervants*, Luk. 15. 19. And if we have his penitence, we ſhall have his ſubmiſſion alſo, and calmly attend Gods diſpoſals of us.

6. As every man in his affliction is to look inward on his own heart, ſo alſo upward and conſider by whoſe providence all events are order'd. *Is there any evil* (*i. e.* of puniſhment) *in the city, and the Lord hath not don it?* Am. 3. 6. and what are we worms that we ſhould diſpute with him? Shall a man contend with his Maker? Let the *potſherd ſtrive with the potſherds of the earth*, Iſa. 45. 9. And as his power is not to be control'd, ſo neither is his juſtice to be impeach'd. *Shall not the judg of all the earth do right?* Gen. 18. 25. And where we can neither reſiſt nor appeal, what have we to do but humbly to ſubmit? Nor are we only compell'd to it by neceſſity, but induced and invited by intereſt, ſince his diſpenſations are directed not barely to aſſert his dominion, but to evidence his paternal care over us. He diſcerns our needs, and accordingly applies

plies to us. The benignity of his nature permits him not to take delight in our diſtreſſes, *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*, Lam. 3. 33. and therefore when ever he adminiſters to us a bitter cup, we may be ſure the ingredients are medicinal, and ſuch as our infirmities require. He dares not truſt our intemperate appetites with unmixt proſperities, the luſhiouſneſs whereof tho it may pleaſe our palats, yet like St. *Johns* book, Rev. 10. 9. that *hony in the mouth may prove gall in the bowels*, ingender the moſt fatal diſeaſes. Let us therefore in our calamities *not conſult with fleſh and blood*, Gal. 1. 16 (which the more it is bemoan'd, the more it complains) but look to the hand that ſtrikes; and aſſure our ſelves, that the ſtripes are not more ſevere, then he ſees neceſſary in order to our good: and ſince they are ſo, they ought in reaſon to be our choices as well as his; and not only Religion, but ſelf-love will promt us to ſay, with old *Ely*, *it is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* 1 Sam. 3. 11. But alas we do not underſtand what is our intereſt; becauſe we do not rightly underſtand what we are our ſelves. We conſider our ſelves merely in our animal

mal being, our bodies and thoſe ſenſitive faculties veſted in them, and when we are invaded there, we think we are undon, tho that breach be made only to relieve that diviner part within us, beſieged and oppreſt with the fleſh about it (for ſo God knows it too often is;) or if we do not conſider it in that notion of an enemy, yet at the utmoſt eſtimate, the body is to the ſoul but as the garment to the body, a decent caſe to cover: now what man (not ſtark frantic) would not rather have his clothes cut then his fleſh? and then by the rate of proportion, we may well queſtion our own ſobriety, when we repine that our ſouls are ſecur'd at the coſt of our bodies, and that is certainly the worſt, the unkindeſt deſign, that God has upon us; and our impatient reſiſtances ſerve only to fruſtrate the kind, and medecinal part of afflictions, but will not at all reſcue us from the ſevere. Our murmurings may ruine our ſouls, but will never avert any of our outward calamities.

7. A ſeventh help to contentment is to have a right eſtimate of the world, & the common ſtate of humanity: to conſider the world but as a ſtage and our ſelues but as actors, and to reſolve that it is very lit-

tle material what part we play ſo we do it well. A Comedian may get as much applauſe by acting the ſlave as the conqueror, and he that acts the one to day, may to morrow reverſe the part, & perſonate the other. So great are the viciſſitudes of the world, that there is no building any firm hopes upon it. All the certainty we have of it, is, that in every condition it has its uneaſineſſes: ſo that when we court a change, we rather ſeek to vary then end our miſeries. And certainly he that has well impreſt upon his mind the vanity & vexation of the world, cannot be much ſurpriſed at any thing that befalls him in it. We expect no more of any thing but to do its kind, and we may as well be angry that we cannot bring the lions to our cribs, or fix the wind to a certain point, as that we cannot ſecure our ſelves from dangers and diſappointments in this rough and mutable world. We are therefore to lay it as an infallible maxim, that in this vale of tears every man muſt meet with ſorrows and diſaſters: and then ſure we may take our peculiar with evenneſs of temper, as being but the natural conſequent of our being men. And tho poſſibly we may every one think himſelf to have

have a double portion, yet that is uſually from the deceitful compariſon we make of our ſelves with others. We take the magnifying glaſſes of diſcontent and envy when we view our own miſeries & others felicities, but look on our enjoiments and their ſufferings thro the contracting optics of ingratitude and incompaſſion: and whilſt we do thus, tis impoſſible but we muſt foment our own diſſatisfactions. He that will compare to good purpoſe, muſt do it honeſtly and ſincerely, and view his neighbors calamities with the ſame attention he do's his own, and his own comforts with the ſame he do's his neighbors; and then many of the great ſeeming inequalities would come pretty neer a level.

8. But even where they do not, it in the 8th place deſerves however to be conſider'd how ill natur'd a thing it is, for any man to think himſelf more miſerable becauſe another is happy: and yet this is the very thing, by which alone many men have made themſelves wretched: for many have created wants, merely from the envious contemplation of other mens abundance. And indeed there is nothing more diſingenuous, or (go to higher) more

Diabolical. *Lucifer* was happy enough in his original ſtate, yet could not think himſelf ſo becauſe he was *not like the moſt high* Iſa. 14. 14. And when by that inſolent ambition he had forfeited bliſs, it has ever ſince bin an aggravation of his torment, that mankind is aſſumed to a capacity of it; and accordingly he makes it the deſign of his envious induſtry to defeat him. Now how perfectly are the two firſt parts of this copy tranſcrib'd, by thoſe who firſt cannot be ſatisfied with any inferior degree of proſperity, and then whet their impatiencies with other mens enjoiments of what they cannot attain? And tis much to be doubted, that they who go thus far may compleat the parallel, and endeavor when they have opportunity to undermine that happineſs they envy. Therefore ſince Satan is ſo apt to impreſs his whole image, where he has drawn any of his lineaments, it concerns us warily to guard our ſelves, and by a Chriſtian ſympathy with our Brethren, *rejoice with them that do rejoice*, Rom. 12. 15. make the comforts of others an allay, not an improvement of our own miſeries. Charity has a ſtrange magnetic power, and attracts the concerns of our brethren to us,

and

& he that has that in his breaſt can never want refreſhment, whilſt any about him are happy; for by adopting their intereſt, he ſhares in their joies. *Jethro* tho an alien *rejoiced for all the good God had don to Iſrael*, Exod. 18. 9. and why ſhould not we have as ſenſible a concurrence with our fellow Chriſtians? And he that has ſo, will ſtill find ſomthing to balance his own ſufferings.

9. LET him that aſpires to contentment ſet bounds to his deſire. Tis our common fault in this affair, we uſually begin at the wrong end, we *enlarge our deſires as hell, and cannot be ſatisfied.* Hab. 2. 5. and then think God uſes us ill, if he de not fill our inſatiable appetites: whereas if we would confine our expectations to thoſe things which we need, or he has promis'd, there are few of us who would not find them abundantly anſwer'd. Alas how few things are there which our nature (if not ſtimulated by fancy and luxury) requires? And how rare is it to find them who want thoſe? Nay who have not many additionals for delight & pleſure? And yet Gods promiſe under the Goſpel extends only to thoſe neceſſaries: for where *Chriſt* aſſures his diſciples that *theſe things ſhall be*

be added unto them, Mat. 6. 33. the context apparently reſtrains *theſe things* to meat and drink and clothing. Therefore take *no thought for the life what you ſhall eat, or what you ſhall drink, nor yet for the body what you ſhall put on*, verſe 25. now what pretence have we to claim more then our Charter gives us? God never articled with the ambitious to give him honors, or with the covetous to fill his bags, or with the voluptuous to feed his luxuries. Let us therefore, if we expect to be ſatisfied, modeſtly confine our deſires within the limits he has ſet us: and then every acceſſion which he ſuperadds will appear (what it is) a largeſs and bounty. But whilſt our appetites are boundleſs, & rather ſtretcht then filled with our acqueſt's, what poſſibility is there of their ſatisfaction: And when we importune God for it, we do but aſſign him ſuch a task the Poets made a repreſentation of their Hell, the filling a ſieve with water, or the rolling a ſtone up a precipice.

10ly A great expedient for contentment, is to confine our thoughts to the preſent, and not to let them looſe to future events. Would we but do this, we might ſhake off a great part of our burden:

den: for we often heap fantaſtic loads upon our ſelves by anxious preſages of things which perhaps will never happen, and yet ſink more under them, then under the real weight that is actual upon us. and this is certainly one of the greateſt follies imaginable: for either the evil will come or it will not: if it will, tis ſure no ſuch deſirable gueſt that we ſhould go out to meet it, we ſhall feel it time enough when it falls on us, we need not project to anticipate our ſenſe of it: but if it will not, what extreme madneſs is it for a man to torment himſelf with that which will never be, to create engines of tortures, and by ſuch aerial afflictions, make himſelf as miſerable as the moſt real ones could do? And truly this is all that we uſually get by our fore-ſights. Previſion is one of Gods attributes, and he mocks at all our pretences to it, by a frequent defeating of all our fore-caſts. He do's it often in our hopes: ſome little croſs circumſtance many times demoliſhes thoſe goodly machins we raiſe to our ſelves: and he do's it no leſs in our fears: thoſe ills we ſolemnly expected often baulk us, and others from an unexpected coaſt ſuddenly invade us. And ſince we are ſo blind, ſo ſhort-ſighted,

let

let us never take upon us to be ſcouts, to diſcover danger at a diſtance (for tis manifold odds we ſhall only bring home falſe alarms) but let us reſt our ſelves upon that moſt admirable Aphoriſm of our bleſſed Lord, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*, Mat 6. 34. apply our ſelves with Chriſtian courage to bear the preſent, and leave God either to augment or diminiſh, as he ſees fit, for the future. Or if we will needs be looking forward, let it be in obedience not contradiction to our duty; let us entertain our ſelves with thoſe futurities which we are ſure are not Chimera's, death and judgment, heaven and hell. The nearer we draw theſe things to our view, the more inſenſible will all intermedial objects be; they will deceive our ſenſe of preſent, and much more fore-ſtal the apprehenſion of future evils: for tis our neglect of things eternal, that leaves us thus at leaſure for the tranſitory.

11. In the laſt place let us in all our diſtreſſes ſuperſede our anxieties and ſolicitudes by that moſt effectual remedy the Apoſtle preſcribes, *Is any man afflicted, let him pray*, Jam. 5. 14. And this ſure is a moſt rational preſcription: for alas what elſe can we do towards the redreſs of

of our griefs. We who are ſoimpotent, that we have not power over the moſt deſpicable excreſcence of our own body, cannot make *one hair white or black*, Mat. 5. 36. what can we do towards the new moulding our condition, or modelling things without us? Our ſolicitudes ſerve only to bind our burdens faſter upon us, but this expedient of Praier will certainly relieve us. *Call upon me*, ſaies God, *in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou ſhalt praiſe me*, Pſal. 50. 15. Whenever therefore we are ſinking in the floods of affliction, let us thus ſupport our ſelves by repreſenting our wants unto our gracious Lord, cry unto him as St. *Peter* did, Mat. 14. 30. and he will *take us by the hand*, *and be the winds* never ſo *boiſterous or contrary*, preſerve from ſinking: the waves or billows of this troubleſom world, will ſerve but to toſs us cloſer into his arms, who can with a word appeaſe the rougheſt tempeſt, or reſcue from it. O let us not then be ſo unkind to our ſelves, as to neglect this infallible means of our deliverance! but with the Pſalmiſt take our refuge under the *ſhadow of the divine wings till the calamity be over-paſt*. Pſa. 57. 1. And as this is a ſure expedient in

all our real important afflictions, ſo is it a good teſt by which to try what are ſo. We are often peeviſh and diſquieted at trifles, nay we take up the quarrels of our luſts and vices, and are diſcontended when they want their wiſht ſupplies. Now in either of theſe caſes, no man that at all conſiders who he praies to, will dare to inſert theſe in his praiers, it being a contemt of God to invoke him in things ſo ſlight as the one, or impious as the other. It will therefore be good for every man when he goes to addreſs for relief, to conſider what of his preſſures they are, that are worthy of that ſolemn deprecation: and when he has ſingled thoſe out, let him reflect, and he will find he has in that prejudg'd all his other diſcontents as frivolous or wicked. And then ſure he cannot think fit to harbour them, but muſt for ſhame diſmiſs them, ſince they are ſuch, as he dare not avow to him, from whom alone he can expect relief. God alwaies pities our real miſeries, but our imaginary ones dare not demand it. Let us not then create ſuch diſeaſes to our ſelves, as we cannot declare to our Phyſitian: and when thoſe are precluded, for all the reſt St.

Pauls

Pauls recipe is a Catholicon, *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by praiers and supplications, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.* Phil. 4. 6.

Sect. XI.

Of Reſignation.

1. AND now amidſt ſuch variety of receits, twill be hard to inſtance any one ſort of calamity which can eſcape their efficacy, if they be but duly appli'd. But indeed we have generally a compendious way of fruſtrating all remedies by never making uſe of them: like fantaſtic patients we are well enough content to have our diſeaſe diſcourſt, and medicines preſcrib'd, but when the Phyſic comes, have ſtill ſome pretence or other to protract the taking it. But I ſhall beſeech the Reader to conſider, that counſels are not charms, to work without any cooperation of the concern'd perſon: they muſt be adverted to, they muſt be ponder'd and conſider'd, and finally they muſt be practic'd, or elſe the utmoſt good they can do us, is to give us a few hours divertiſment in the reading: but they do us a miſchief that infinitly out-weighs it, for they improve

prove our guilts by the ineffective tender they make of reſcuing us from them, and leave us accountable not only for the original crimes, but for our obſtinate adheſion to them in ſpight of admonition.

2. I ſay this becauſe it is a little too notorious, that many take up books only as they do cards or dice, as an inſtrument of diverſion. Tis a good entertainment of their curioſity to ſee what can be ſaid upon any ſubject, and be it well or ill handled, they can pleaſe themſelves equally with the ingenuity or ridiculouſneſs of the compoſure, and when they have don this, they have don all they deſign'd. This indeed may be tolerable in Romances and Play-books, but ſure it ill befits Divinity. And yet I fear it oftneſt happens there: for in the former ſome do project for ſome trivial improvements, as the embelliſhing of their ſtile, the inſpiriting of their fancies; and ſome men would ſcarce be able to drive their pedling trade of wit, did they not thus ſweep the ſtage: but alas how many books of piety are read, of which one cannot diſcern the leaſt tincture in mens converſations, which ſure do's in a great meſure proceed from the want of a determinate deſign in their

their reading, mens practice being not apt to be leſs rovers then their ſpeculatiou. He that takes a practical ſubject in hand, muſt do it with a deſign to conform his practice to what he ſhall there be convinc'd to be his duty, and he that comes not with this probity of mind, is uot like to be much benefited by his reading.

3. But one would think this ſhould be an unneceſſary caution at this time, for ſince the intent of this tract, is only to ſhew men the way to contentment, 'tis to be ſuppos'd the Readers will be as much in earneſt as the writer can be, it being every mans proper and moſt important intereſt, the inſtating him in the higheſt and moſt ſupreme felicity that this world can admit: yet for all this fair probability, I doubt many will in this inſtance have the ſame indifference they have in their other ſpiritual concerns.

4. 'Tis true indeed that a querulous repining humor, is one of the moſt pernicious, the moſt ugly habits incident to mankind; but yet as deformed people are oft the moſt in love with themſelves, ſo this crooked piece of our temper is of all others the moſt indulgent to it ſelf. Melan-

lancholy is the moſt ſtubborn and untractable of al humors; and diſcontent being the offspring of that, partakes of that inflexibility: and accordingly we ſee how impregnable it often is, againſt all aſſaults of reaſon and religion too. *Jonah* in a ſullen mood would juſtify his diſcontent even to God himſelf, and in ſpight of that calm reproof, *doſt thou well to be angry?* Jon. 4. 9. aver *he did well to be angry even to the death.* And do we not frequently ſee men upon an impatience of ſome diſappointment, grow angry even at their comforts? Their friends, their children, their meat, their drink, every thing grows nauſeous to them, and in a frantic diſcontent, they often fling away thoſe things which they moſt value? Beſides, this peeviſh impatience is of ſo aerial a diet, that tis ſcarce poſſible to ſtarve it. Twill nuriſh it ſelf with Phantaſms and Chimeras, ſuborn a thouſand ſurmiſes & imaginary diſtreſſes to abet its pretences: and tho every one of us can remonſtrate to another, the unreaſonableneſs of this diſcontent; yet ſcarce any of us will draw the argument home, or ſuffer our ſelves to be convinc'd by what we urge as irrefragable to others. Nay farther this humor is impatient of any

any diverſion, loves to converſe only with it ſelf. In bodily pains, men that deſpair of cure are yet glad of allaies & mitigations, and ſtrive by all arts, to divert and deceive the ſenſe of their anguiſh; but in this diſeaſe of the mind, men cheriſh and improve their torment, roll and chew the bitter pill in their mouths, that they may be ſure to have its utmoſt flavor; and by devoting all their thoughts to the ſubject of their grief, keep up an uninterrupted ſenſe of it: as if they had the ſame Tyranny for themſelves which *Caligula* had for others, and loved to feel themſelves die. Indeed there is not a more abſur'd contradiction in the world, then to hear men cry out of the weight, the intolerableneſs of their burden, and yet graſp it as faſt as if their life were bound up in it; will not depoſite it, no not for the ſmaleſt breathing time. A ſtrange faſcination ſure, and yet ſo frequent, that it ought to be the fundamental care of him that would cure men of their diſcontents, to bring them to a hearty willingneſs of being cured.

5. It may be this will look like paradox, and every man will be apt to ſay he wiſhes nothing more in earneſt, then to be

be cured of his preſent diſcontent. He that is poor would be cured by wealth, he that is low and obſcure by honor and greatneſs: but ſo an Hydropic perſon may ſay he deſires to have his thirſt cur'd by a perpetual ſupply of drink: yet all ſober people know, that that is the way only to increaſe it: but let the whole habit of the body be rectified, and then the thirſt will ceaſe of it ſelf. And certainly tis the very ſame in the preſent caſe: no outward acceſſions will ever ſatisfy our cravings, our appetites muſt be tam'd and reduc'd, and then they will never be able to raiſe tumults, or put us into mutiny and diſcontent: and he (and none but he) that ſubmits to this method, can truly be ſaid to deſire a cure.

6. But he that thus atteſts the reality of his deſires, and ſeeks contentment in its proper ſphere, may ſurely arrive to ſome conſiderable degrees of it. We find in all ages men, that only by the direction of natural light have calmed their diſquiets, and reaſon'd themſelves into contentment even under great and ſenſible preſſures; men who amidſt the acuteſt torments, have ſtill preſerv'd a ſerenity of mind, and have fruſtrated con-

temts & reproches by disregarding them: and sure we give a very ill account of our Christianity, if we cannot do as much with it, as they did without it.

7. I do not here propose such a Stoical insensibility as makes no distinction of events, which, tho it has bin vainly pretended to by many, yet sure was never attain'd by any upon the strength of discourse. Some natural dulnesse or casual stupefaction must concur to that, and perhaps by doing so, has had the luck to be canoniz'd for vertue. I mean only such a superioriry of mind as raises us above our sufferings, tho it exemt us not from the sense of them. We cannot purpose to our selves a higher patern in any vertue theu our blessed Lord: yet we see he not only felt that load under which he lay, but had the most pungent and quick sense of it, such as promted those earnest deprecations, *Father if it be possible let thus cup pass*: yet all those displacencies of his flesh were surmounted by the resignation of his spirit, *nevertheless not what I will but what thou wilt*, Luk. 22. And certainly he that in imitation of this pattern, do's in spight of all the reluctancies of his sense, thus entirely submit his will, how-

however he may be ſad, yet he is not impatient; nor is he like to be ſad long, for to him that is thus reſign'd, *light will ſpring up*, Pſal. 97. 11. ſome good Angel will be ſent like that to our Savior to relieve his diſconſolation. God will ſend either ſome outward allaies, or give ſuch interior comforts and ſupports, as ſhall counterpoiſe thoſe afflictions he takes not off.

8. INDEED the grand deſign of God in correcting us is (the ſame with that of a prudent parent towards his child) to break our wills. That ſtubborn facultywill ſcarce bend with eaſy touches, and therefore do's require ſome force: and when by that rougher handling, he has brought it to a pliantneſs, the work is don. 'Tis therefore our intereſt to cooperate with this deſign, to aſſiſt as much as we are able towards the ſubjugating this unruly part of our ſelves. This is that *Sheba* 2 Sam. 20. the ſurrendring of whom is Gods expectation in all the cloſe ſieges he laies to us. Let us then be ſo wiſe, as by an early reſigning it to divert his farther hoſtilities, and buy our peace with him.

9. AND truly this is the way not only to gain peace with him, but our ſelves

too: tis the uſurpation of our will over our reaſon which breeds all the confuſion and tumults within our own breaſts, and there is no poſſibility of curbing its inſolence, but by putting it into ſafe cuſtody, committing it to him who (as our Church teaches us) alone can order the unruly wills of ſinful men. ¶ Indeed nothing but experience can fully inform us of the ſerenity and calm of that ſoul, who has reſign'd his will to God. All care of chuſing for himſelf is happily ſuperſeded, he is temted to no anxions forecaſts for future events, for he knows nothing can happen in contradiction of that ſupreme will, in which he hath ſanctuary: which will certainly chuſe for him with that tenderneſs and regard, that a faithful Guardian would for his pupil, an indulgent father for his child that caſts its ſelf into his arms. Certainly there is not in the world ſuch a holy ſort of artifice, ſo Divine a charm to ty our God to us, as this of reſigning our ſelves to him. We find the Gibeonites by yielding themſelves vaſſals to the Iſraelites, had their whole army at their beck to reſcue them in their danger *Joſ.* 10. 6. and can we think God is leſs conſiderate of his homagers and dependents?

No

No certainly, his honor as well as his compaſſion is concern'd in the relief of thoſe who have ſurrendred themſelves to him.

10. FARTHER yet, when by reſignation we have united our wills to God, we have quite changed the ſcene, and we who when our wills ſtood ſingle were liable to perpetual defeats, in this bleſſed combination can never be croſt. When our will is twiſted and involved with Gods, the ſame omnipotence which backs his will, do's alſo attend ours. Gods will, we are ſure, admits of no controle, can never be reſiſted, and we have the ſame ſecurity for ours, ſo long as it concurs with it. By this means all calamities are unſting'd, and even thoſe things which are moſt repugnant to our ſenſitive natures, are yet very agreeable to our ſpirits, when we conſider they are implicitly our own choice, ſince they are certainly his, whom we have deputed to elect for us. Indeed there can be no face of adverſity ſo averting and formidable, which ſet in this light will not look amiable. We ſee daily how many uneaſineſſes and prejudices men will contentedly ſuffer in purſuit of their wills: and if we have really eſpouſed Gods, made his will ours, we ſhall with

with as great (nay far greater) alacrity embrace its distributions, how uneasy soever to our sense; our souls will more acquiesce in the accomplishment of the Divine will, then our flesh can reluct to any severe effects of it.

11. Here then is that footing of firm ground, on which whosoever can stand, may indeed do that which *Archimedes* boasted, move the whole world. He may as to himself subvert the whole course of sublunary things, unvenem all those calamities which are to others the gall of Asps; and in a farther sense verify that Evangelical prophecy, of *beating swords into plough-shares, and spears into pruning hooks*, Esay. 2. 4. the most hostile weapons, the most adverse events, shall be by him converted into instruments of fertility, shall only advance his spiritual growth.

12. And now who can chuse but confess this a much more eligible state, then to be alwaies harrassed with solicitudes and cares, perpetually either fearing future defeats, or bewailing the past. And then what can we call it less then madness or enchantment, for men to act so contrary to their own dictates, yea to

their

their very ſenſe and experience, too ſee and acknowledge the inexplicable felicity of a reſigned will, and yet perverſely to hold out theirs, tho they can get nothing by it, but the ſullen pleaſure of oppoſing God, and tormenting themſelves? Let us therefore if not for our duty or eaſe, yet at leaſt for our reputation, the aſſerting our ſelves men of ſobriety and common ſenſe, do that which upon all theſe intereſts we are obliged; let us but give up our wills, and with them we ſhall certainly diveſt our ſelves of all our fruitleſs anxieties, & caſt our burdens upon him who invites us to do ſo. He who bears all our ſins, will bear all our ſorrows, our griefs too: if we will but be content to depoſite them, he will relieve us from all thoſe oppreſſing weights, which make *our ſouls cleave to the duſt*, Pſal. 119. 25. and will in exchange give us only his *light, his pleaſant burden*, Mat. 12. 33. In a word there will be no care left for us, but that of keeping our ſelves in a capacity of his: let us but ſecure our love to him, and we are aſcertain'd that *all things ſhall work together for our good*, Rom. 8. 28.

To conclude, Reſignation and Contentment are vertues not only of a near cogna-

cognation and reſemblance, but they are linked as the Cauſe and the Effect. Let us but make ſure of Reſignation, and Content will flow into us without our farther induſtry: as on the contrary whilſt our wills are at defiance with Gods, we ſhall alwaies find things at as great defiance with ours. All our ſubtilties or induſtries will never mould them to our ſatisfactions, till we have moulded our ſelves into that pliant temper that we can cordially ſay, *It is the Lord, let him do what ſeemeth him good.* 1 Sam. 3. 18.

The Close.

1. THIS ſhort inſtitution of the *Art of Contentment*, cannot more naturally, or more deſirably draw to a concluſion, then in the reſort we have given it, in the boſome of divine *Providence*. The Roman conquerors as the laſt pitch of all their triumphs, went to the Capitol, and laid their Garlands in the lap of *Jupiter*: but the Chriſtian has an eaſier way to Triumph, to put his crown of thornes (for that is the trophy of his victories) within the arms of his gracious God; there lodg his fears, his wants, his ſorrows, and himſelf too, as in the beſt repoſitory.

2. THE Goſpel command of *not caring for the morrow*, Mat. 6. 34. and being *careful for nothing*, Phil. 4 6. nakedly propos'd, might ſeem the abandoning of us to all the calamities of life: but when we are directed to *caſt all our care* upon a gracious and all-powerful Parent, and are aſſur'd that *he cares for us*, 1 Pet. 5. 7. that *tho a woman may forget her ſucking child, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion*

of the ſon of her womb, yet will he not forget his children, Iſa. 49. 15. this will abundantly ſuperſede all cavil and objection. Whilſt worldly men truſt in an arm of fleſh, lay up *treſure on earth*, a prey for *ruſt and moth*, Mat. 6. 19. and *a torment* to themſelves, Jam. 5. 3. the Chriſtian has Omnipotence for his ſupport, and a *treſure in heaven, where no thief approches, nor moth corrupts*, Mat. 6. 20. Whil'ſt bold inquirers call in queſtion Gods ſecret will, oblige him to their ſub or ſupralapſarian ſchemes, their abſolute or conditional decrees, their grace foreſeen or predetermin'd; the pious man with aweful acquieſcence ſubmits to that which is revel'd: reſolves for ever to obey, but never to diſpute; as knowing that the belov'd Diſciple lean'd on his Maſters boſome; but tis the thiefs and traitors part to go about to rifle it.

3. Tis ſurely a modeſt demand in the behalf of God Almighty, that we ſhould allow him as much privilege in his World, as every Peſant claimes in his Cottage; to be Maſter there, and diſpoſe of his houſehold as he thinks beſt: to *ſay to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to his ſervant, Do this,*

and

and he doth it, Mat. 8. 9. And if we would afford him this liberty, there would be an immediate end put to all clamor and complaint.

4. We make it our daily praier that the *will* of God *may be don in earth as it is in heaven*, with a ready, swift, and uninterrupted constancy. As tis Giant-like rebellion to set up our will against his, so is it mad perverseness to set it up against our own; be displeas'd that our requests are granted, and repine that his, and therewith our will is don. It were indeed not only good manners, but good policy, to observe the direction of the Heathen, and *follow God*, not prejudg his determination by ours; but in a modest suspension of our thoughts, *hearken what the Lord God will say concerning us, for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his Saints that they turn not again*, Psa. 15. 8.

5. Or however upon surprise we may indulge to a passionate affection, and dote upon our illegitimate off-spring, our dearling guilts or follies, as *David* did upon that Child, who was the price of Murder and adultery: yet when the brat is taken from us, when the *Child is dead*, it will

become us to do as he did, riſe from our ſullen poſture on the earth, and *worſhip in the houſe of the Lord*, 2 Sam. 12. 20. It will behove us, as he ſaies in another place, to *lay our hand upon our mouth, becauſe it was his doing*, Pſal. 30. 10. and with holy *Job* Chap. 40. 4. when charg'd with his murmurings, *Behold I am vile, what ſhall I anſwer? Once have I ſpoken, but I will not anſwer: yea twice, but I will proceed no farther.*

6. *Socrates* rightly ſaid of Contentment, oppoſing it to the riches of fortune and opinion, that tis the wealth of nature; for it gives every thing that we have learnt to want, and really need: but Reſignation is the riches of Grace, beſtowing all things that a Chriſtian not only needs, but can deſire, even Almighty God himſelf. He indeed, as the Scholemen teach, is the objective happineſs of the Creature; He who is the fountain of being, muſt be alſo of bleſſedneſs: and tho this be only communicable to us, when we have put off that *fleſh which cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, and laid aſide that *corruption* which cannot *inherit incorruption*, 1 Cor. 15. yet even in this life, we may make approches to that bleſ-

ſed

ſed ſtate, by acts of Reſignation and denial of our ſelves. It was the generous ſaying of *Socrates* being about to die unto his friend; O *Crito*, ſince it is the will of God, ſo let it be: *Anytus* and *Melitus* may kill me, but cannot hurt me. But ſuch a reſignation as tis infinitly a greater duty to a Chriſtian, ſo it is alſo a more firm ſecurity. In that caſe tis not the *Martyr*, but *Jeſus* of *Nazareth* who is thus perſecuted, and he who attaques him will find *it hard to prick againſt the pricks*, Act. 9. 5.

7. THERE could not be a greater inſtance of the profligate ſenſuality of the *Iſraelites*, then that they murmured for want of *leeks and onions*, Numb. 11. 5. when they are Angels food, and had bread rain'd down from heaven. Tis impoſſible for the ſoul that is ſenſible of God Almighties favor, to repine at any earthly preſſure. *The Lord is my ſhepherd*, ſaith *David*, *therefore can I lack nothing*, Pſa. 23. 1. And, *thou haſt put gladneſs into my heart, more then when their corn, and wine, and oil encreaſed*, Pſa. 4. 7. & in paſſionate rapture he cries out, Pſa. 73. 25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee: and there is none upon earth that I deſire in compariſon of thee?*

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my fleſh and my heart faileth: but God is the ſtrength of my heart, and my portion for ever. And likewiſe Pſal. 46. 1. *God is our hope and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, tho the earth be moved: and tho the hills be carried into the midſt of the ſea. Tho the waters thereof rage and ſwell, and tho the mountains ſhake at the tempeſt of the ſame.* If *God* be *in the midſt of us, we ſhall not be removed, he will help us, and that right early.* Let us therefore poſſeſs our ſelves of this ſupport, and as the Prophet adviſes Iſa. 8. 12. *neither fear, nor be afraid,* in any exigence how great ſoever; but *be ſtill and quiet, and ſanctify the Lord of hoſts himſelf, and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread.*

FINIS.

THE CONTENTS.

SECTION

1. *Of the neceſſary Connexion between Happineſs and Contentment.* *p.* 1.
2. *Of Gods Abſolute Soveraignty.* *p.* 17.
3. *Of Gods Unlimited Bounty.* *p.* 28.
4. *Of the Surpluſage of our Enjoiments above our Sufferings.* *p.* 56.
5. *Of our Demerit towards God.* *p.* 86.
6. *Of Gods general Providence.* *p.* 107.
7. *Of Gods particular Providence.* *p.* 121.
8. *Of the Advantage of Afflictions.* *p.* 130.
9. *Of our Misfortunes compar'd with other mens.* *p.* 156.
10. *Of particular aids for the gaining Contentment.* *p.* 178.
11. *Of Reſignation.* *p.* 196.

The Cloſe. *p.* 209.